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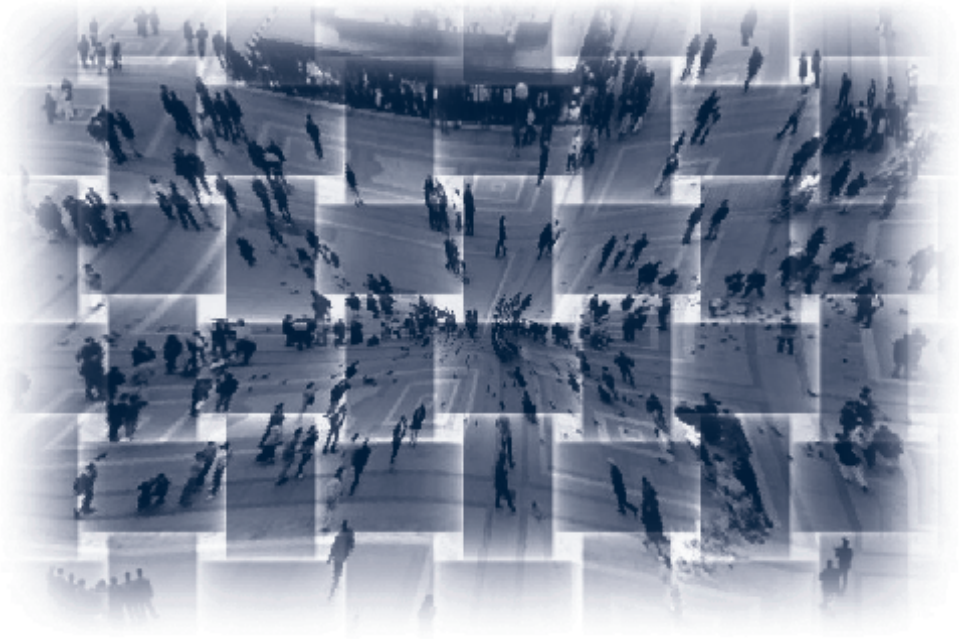

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Academic papers grounded in empirical research or focused on the social realities of Central and Eastern Europe are particularly welcomed.

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CAREER ANCHORS REIMAGINED: EXPERTISE, STABILITY AND RECOGNITION IN STRUCTURED ORGANIZATIONAL FIELDS

Anca Simona SIMIONCA[1]

ABSTRACT. This article explores how professionals in a multinational IT company construct career identities that intertwine ambition, recognition, and stability—challenging dominant models that equate ambition with autonomy and instability. Drawing on a sequential exploratory mixed-methods design—48 qualitative interviews and a survey of 764 employees—it identifies "expertise" as a distinct career anchor defined not merely by technical skill, but by internal recognition, symbolic legitimacy, and trusted authority. Quantitative validation through factor analysis confirmed a revised nine-anchor model, with widespread hybrid identities (e.g., expertise + lifestyle, expertise + security) emerging as normative, not transitional. The article reframes security not as passivity but as an entitlement earned through excellence. Interpreted through a career field and habitus lens, these findings reposition career anchors as relational identity positions shaped by organizational recognition regimes, symbolic capital, and contextual fit. The study contributes a grounded critique of protean and boundaryless career models, proposing an alternative understanding of stability, ambition, and growth in contemporary structured work environments.

Keywords: career identity, career anchors, expertise, protean careers, stability

Introduction

In contemporary career theory, the ideal worker is frequently portrayed as autonomous, flexible, and entrepreneurial—attributes epitomized by the protean (Hall, 1996) and boundaryless (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996) career models.

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Within these frameworks, values such as security, stability, and long-term organizational commitment are often framed as outdated, misaligned with the innovation-driven demands of modern work. Yet, these assumptions remain largely untested in structured, high-performance environments, where ambition, legitimacy, and organizational embeddedness coexist in complex ways.

This article challenges the presumed incompatibility between professional ambition and career security. Drawing on a sequential exploratory mixed-methods study conducted in the Romanian subsidiary of a multinational IT organization, it explores how employees construct career identities within a field defined by formal evaluation systems, internal mobility, and symbolic recognition. The study investigates how employees articulate and combine career values such as expertise, ambition, and stability, and whether existing career anchor frameworks can adequately account for these expressions—or require conceptual revision.

The first, inductive phase of qualitative interviews revealed the salience of a previously under-theorized identity anchor: *expertise*, defined not merely by technical proficiency, but by internal legitimacy, trusted authority, and symbolic value within the organization. Employees frequently described a desire not just to "do well," but to "be known" as experts—to be recognized and valued by peers and managers. These narratives also foregrounded security as a valued outcome—not in terms of risk aversion, but as a reward for sustained excellence and accumulated capital.

The quantitative phase validated these insights, yielding a revised nine-anchor model that confirmed expertise as a distinct construct and revealed the prevalence of hybrid anchor configurations—particularly combinations like expertise + lifestyle or expertise + security. These patterns suggest that hybrid identities are not transitional or incoherent, but structured and normatively supported positions within the organizational field. Career anchors, in this context, are not fixed personality traits but symbolic identity positions, co-constructed through the interplay of individual biography, institutional recognition systems, and contextual fit.

Deploying career anchor theory heuristically and interpreting the findings through the lens of career field and habitus (Mayrhofer et al., 2004), this article reframes anchors as relational stances embedded in structured environments. It challenges the traditional assumptions of singular anchor dominance and context-free career motivations, offering instead a recognition-based, institutionally situated model of career identity. The following sections outline the theoretical foundations, methodological approach, and key findings, and discuss how this case contributes to rethinking the meaning of ambition, legitimacy, and stability in contemporary organizational careers.

Theoretical background

Over the past two decades, research on careers has been shaped by the rise of the protean (Hall, 1996; Hall & Mirvis, 1995; Briscoe & Hall, 2006) and boundaryless (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Sullivan & Arthur, 2006) career models. These paradigms shifted attention away from externally defined, organizationally bound career paths toward self-directed, mobile, and value-driven trajectories, emphasizing psychological success over hierarchical advancement. Central to both is the idea that autonomy, flexibility, and personal adaptability are the core competencies for navigating unstable labor markets (Arthur et al., 2005; Baruch, 2004).

Within this discourse, values such as stability, predictability, or organizational loyalty are often associated with stagnation or passivity. Mobility is not only framed as desirable but frequently equated with ambition itself. While these models have captured important structural changes—such as the decline of internal labor markets and the rise of project-based work—they have also come under increasing critique. Scholars argue that they promote a narrow, individualistic conception of agency and overlook the continued influence of organizational structures, institutional norms, and sectoral logics on career development (Inkson et al., 2012; Rodrigues & Guest, 2010; Mayrhofer et al., 2005; Tomlinson et al., 2018; Caza, Vough & Puranik, 2018).

Moreover, assumptions about universal preferences for mobility have been challenged by research showing that career orientations are mediated by gender, class, life stage, and national context (Tams & Arthur, 2010; O'Neil et al., 2008). At stake in these debates is the status of values like stability and internal legitimacy, which are often positioned as regressive or outdated, but may in fact represent meaningful, recognition-based expressions of career success.

Despite this growing critique, the concept of career security remains under-theorized. While some workers continue to express a desire for predictability and long-term engagement, such preferences are often treated as defensive or incompatible with "successful" career behavior. High-performance environments—particularly multinational firms, IT sectors, and professional services—have rarely been examined for how stability can be positively integrated into aspirational career identities (Tomlinson, Baird, Berg & Cooper, 2018; De Vos & Van der Heijden, 2015).

Parallel to these developments, career anchor theory, originally developed by Schein (1978, 1990), has offered a durable typology for understanding career motivations. Schein's model identifies several "anchors"—such as technical competence, autonomy, managerial ambition, service, and security—around which individuals stabilize over time. However, this framework has come under sustained critique. It assumes that career orientations are internal, consistent, and

singular, with little room for contextual or organizational variation (Feldman & Bolino, 1996). In practice, studies have repeatedly found evidence of multiple coexisting values and shifting anchor dominance across the life course (Ramakrishna & Potosky, 2003; Wils et al., 2014).

Recent empirical studies have responded to these critiques by revisiting and revising Schein's original typology, often through quantitative methods designed to test its structural robustness. For instance, Danziger, Rachman-Moore, and Valency (2008) used confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to test whether Schein's eight-anchor framework accurately captured the career motivations of Israeli MBA students. Their findings supported a modified nine-factor model, with an additional anchor related to work-life balance emerging independently—an early signal of how new configurations can arise from changing labor norms.

Similarly, Costigan, Donahue, and Danziger (2016) applied CFA to a diverse sample of working adults in the U.S., again validating a nine-anchor structure. Their model retained the core of Schein's framework but revealed shifts in the salience and internal coherence of several anchors, including autonomy and technical competence. Notably, they found that anchors such as "service" and "lifestyle" clustered more tightly among respondents working in knowledge-intensive sectors, suggesting that the sociocultural and occupational context significantly shapes how anchor preferences are expressed and experienced.

Other scholars have moved beyond CFA to explore anchor hybridity and fluidity across time. Wils et al. (2014), in a longitudinal study of engineers, examined how career anchors evolve as individuals progress through different life and work stages. Their findings not only confirmed that most individuals exhibit multiple coexisting anchors, but also that the dominant anchor can shift over time in response to personal development or organizational change. This evidence challenges the original premise that career anchors stabilize early and remain fixed.

In parallel, newer studies—such as Cabot and Gagnon (2021)—have turned their attention to how digital transformation reshapes the content of existing anchors. Their research on IT professionals showed that in project-based and knowledge-heavy environments, identity is constructed less through fixed roles and more through recognition, embedded expertise, and visibility within the organizational network. These symbolic forms of career capital are not well captured by traditional anchor categories, pushing the field toward more relational and context-sensitive models.

Together, these studies point toward a growing consensus: while Schein's typology retains heuristic value, the empirical reality of career motivations is more dynamic, composite, and field-dependent than originally assumed. This expanding body of evidence provides a strong foundation for reimagining

career anchors not as fixed psychological predispositions, but as evolving identity positions shaped by institutional structures, cultural logics, and changing norms of recognition.

This evolving view aligns with broader efforts to theorize careers as socially embedded (Granrose & Portwood, 1987; Inkson, 2004). One particularly fruitful approach is the career field and habitus perspective developed by Mayrhofer et al. (2004), drawing on Bourdieu's framework to reposition career orientations as symbolic positions within structured fields of power and meaning. In this model, the career field encompasses the institutional and organizational context that defines which forms of capital—expertise, visibility, loyalty—are valued and rewarded. The *career habitus* refers to the internalized dispositions, expectations, and preferences individuals develop in relation to these structural forces. Career capital, meanwhile, captures the technical, social, and symbolic resources individuals accumulate through their professional trajectories (Mayrhofer et al., 2005; Iellatchitch, Mayrhofer & Meyer, 2003).

This lens challenges the rigid structure–agency binary that underlies many traditional career models. It views career motivations as co-constructed through institutional affordances, cultural norms, and personal biography. Within this framework, values such as security and stability are not merely psychological preferences or signs of risk aversion—they are legitimated identity claims made within specific organizational fields. In high-status environments, for instance, stability may serve as a reward for accumulated symbolic capital, particularly that associated with expertise and institutional trust.

This article contributes to this evolving conversation by offering a contextually grounded reinterpretation of anchors as symbolic identity positions shaped by internal recognition, organizational discourse, and structured field dynamics. Rather than treating stability, expertise, or internal legitimacy as static traits or individual preferences, this study explores how they are institutionally produced, symbolically encoded, and strategically mobilized within a structured corporate setting.

Methods

This study investigates how contemporary professionals understand and position their careers within a structured, performance-oriented organizational context. It asks how employees construct career identities and values in response to institutional recognition regimes, role expectations, and broader discourses around flexibility and ambition—particularly those embedded in the protean and boundaryless career paradigms. The central research question guiding the study is:

How do professionals construct and position their career identities within a structured, performance-oriented multinational organization that emphasizes innovation, recognition, and internal development?

This question is examined through a case study of a multinational company operating in Romania, which combines high-value innovation work with business process outsourcing (BPO). Within this hybrid setting, the study explores what motivates employees, how they define ambition and success, and how they reconcile career security with professional growth.

Schein's career anchor framework was used heuristically—as a conceptual device to guide both exploration and interpretation. In the qualitative phase, the framework informed the design of the interview guide by highlighting relevant career domains (such as autonomy, security, service, and recognition) without being presented directly to participants. In the quantitative phase, the unmodified Career Orientation Inventory (COI) was used to assess whether the framework could statistically capture career orientation patterns across the organization.

The study pursued three core objectives: (1) to explore how employees articulate their career values and aspirations; (2) to assess the extent to which these value configurations align with or exceed Schein's anchor model; and (3) to test the empirical structure of career orientations and hybrid identities at scale.

The study employed a sequential exploratory mixed-methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011), combining semi-structured interviews with a follow-up survey. The qualitative phase was inductive and exploratory, while the quantitative phase tested the robustness and generalizability of the patterns identified. The anchor framework was applied only after value constellations had emerged from the data, serving to structure, but not determine, interpretation.

Fieldwork took place within the Romanian offices of a multinational firm in the technology and professional services sector. The company operates with formalized career systems, including internal job levels, performance evaluations, and mobility structures. In 2021, a total of 48 semi-structured interviews were conducted with employees across the three business units operating in Romania. Interviews were carried out by three researchers using a shared interview guide, ensuring consistency across conversations. Participants were selected to reflect variation in gender, tenure, and hierarchical level. Interviews were conducted online in Romanian or Hungarian, lasted between 45 and 75 minutes, and were transcribed and analyzed in their original language. All the quotes presented in the article were translated by the author.

Participants were recruited through an internal call circulated by the HR department. As such, the sample likely reflects employees with more favorable

views of the organization. However, the aim was not to audit the firm but to understand how employees frame their careers and values. While some frustrations were voiced, the interviews focused largely on self-reflection rather than critique.

The interview guide was designed to surface values and orientations associated with career anchor theory while allowing new themes to emerge. Anchors were used as a background map to guide question design—covering areas such as personal growth, recognition, ambition, and stability—but participants were free to define their own terms. This approach allowed both alignment with and divergence from established categories to emerge naturally.

Analysis followed grounded theory principles, with codes generated inductively around recurring themes and tensions. The research team identified several interpretive clusters, including the centrality of expertise as a source of professional identity, the reinterpretation of security as a form of institutional legitimacy, and the prevalence of hybrid orientations. These observations informed the design and expectations of the survey phase.

The second phase involved the administration of the Career Orientation Inventory (COI), used in its original form. The survey was distributed online to employees across the same three business units, yielding 764 valid responses. The sample included a cross-section of early- and mid-career professionals working within a structured, performance-based system.

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted using principal axis factoring with oblique (Oblimin) rotation. The eight-anchor structure originally proposed by Schein did not fit the data well. Instead, a nine-factor solution emerged as more robust and interpretable. Among the findings were the fragmentation of the traditional “technical/functional competence” anchor, the emergence of a distinct “expertise” factor centered on internal recognition and symbolic legitimacy, and high levels of hybrid orientation patterns across the sample.

Descriptive statistics and cross-tabulations were used to explore the frequency and distribution of anchor combinations, particularly the co-occurrence of expertise with stability or lifestyle values.

Insights from the two phases were integrated iteratively. The qualitative interviews shaped the survey's interpretive lens, while the factor structure clarified the empirical landscape of orientations across the organization. The analysis focused not on confirming fixed types but on understanding how career identities are expressed, negotiated, and made meaningful within a particular institutional setting.

Qualitative Findings: Careers as Situated Identity Work

The following section describes the qualitative research results and is followed by the quantitative section. However, at this point, the two sources are intertwined in the interpretation.

While dominant career models emphasize autonomy, flexibility, and individual agency, the interviews conducted for this study reveal a more situated and relational understanding of career values. Employees within the organization did not speak of their careers as projects to be optimized or managed, but as embedded trajectories shaped by recognition, legitimacy, and institutional belonging. The interview phase aimed to understand how individuals articulate what matters to them professionally—and how these articulations reflect both personal aspirations and organizational affordances.

The Career as Recognition: Expertise and Symbolic Value

Across all three business units, participants described a deep desire not simply to "perform" well, but to be recognized as trustworthy, skilled, and indispensable. Expertise, in this sense, emerged as a valued identity—distinct from technical competence. It was about being a reference point for others, being sought out, and being acknowledged internally as someone who "knows what they're doing."

> I want people to come to me for advice, not because I shout the loudest but because they know I can fix things. That's what success looks like. (F, mid-career)
> Recognition is not just the bonus or the rating. It's when my manager trusts me with something difficult without even asking. That means I've proven myself.
> (M, junior level)

This emphasis on symbolic expertise reveals a departure from the boundaryless ideal of the self-moving professional. For these employees, internal visibility, peer validation, and managerial trust were central to constructing a sense of worth. Expertise functioned not just as a skillset, but as a career identity anchor that was collectively recognized within the field.

Security as Entitlement, Not Retreat

Stability and security—understood not as comfort or inertia but as a foundation for trust, long-term contribution, and professional legitimacy—were a recurring theme in participants' narratives. Rather than contrasting with ambition or reflecting risk-aversion, participants often described stability

as a sign of organizational credibility, managerial competence, and professional pride. While many referenced the company's response to the COVID-19 pandemic—emphasizing its ability to retain staff and maintain operations during global uncertainty—this appreciation extended beyond the crisis itself. The pandemic simply made more visible a value the participants already held: that a solid, well-managed company enables serious work, long-term trust, and professional identification.

For many, the firm's perceived institutional strength was part of what made it attractive and meaningful as a workplace. Stability was not just protective; it was a precondition for doing meaningful, large-scale work.

> You can't do major global projects if your company feels shaky. I need to know that what I'm building is part of something stable.
> (M, senior level)

Security was also described in relational and positional terms. The same participants who spoke of ambition, innovation, or problem-solving often emphasized that they valued continuity—not as comfort, but as earned legitimacy. It was common to hear that remaining with the company allowed them to leverage internal credibility they had built over time.

> I don't want to job-hop. I've built something here. It took years to get to a place where my work speaks for itself.
> (F, senior level)
> Stability is not being stuck. It's being trusted. I know I can move internally if I want to, but I don't need to prove myself again from scratch.
> (F, mid-career)

This orientation was especially pronounced among employees who had taken on mentorship roles, internal mobility paths, or cross-functional collaborations. Staying in place was not seen as inertia, but as a way of consolidating symbolic capital: trust, visibility, and long-term value. The organization's formalized pathways and regular evaluation cycles reinforced this logic, framing continued internal presence as a sign of growth, not its absence.

Hybrid Orientations as Lived Configurations

A striking feature of the interviews was the frequency with which participants expressed multiple career values simultaneously. Rather than articulating a singular driver of motivation or success, employees described work in terms that combined professionalism with personal wellbeing, ambition with flexibility, and growth with recognition. These orientations were not presented

as contradictions. Instead, they formed coherent and practical frameworks through which individuals navigated their roles.

For many, the ability to grow professionally was closely linked to having the space to manage life outside work. Several interviewees spoke positively about the organization's approach to flexible work arrangements. One mid-career employee noted, "Weekends are weekends—except during the pandemic, when those boundaries blurred a bit." Others emphasized that overtime was rare and usually voluntary: "I have a healthy separation between work and personal life." Several participants mentioned using flexible hours to attend to family needs during the day and catch up later. One woman remarked, "My managers are understanding and open when I want to try something new. There's no pressure to stay late."

At the same time, learning and advancement remained salient. Employees frequently mentioned onboarding processes, mentorship, and project-based learning. "This project is helping me grow," said one participant, "by the end of it, I'll be a better professional." Others highlighted the accessibility of internal training and the sense that development was embedded in everyday work: "Even after the internship, I kept learning. There were free courses and helpful presentations."

Recognition also featured prominently, often linked to both personal development and organizational trust. Several employees described feeling motivated by positive feedback or being assigned more complex tasks. "They gave me harder assignments and trusted me with them," said one analyst. "That showed me I was making progress." Others saw recognition through internal mobility or role clarity: "I applied for a team lead role on a project I know well—it gave me confidence because I already understand the procedures."

Taken together, these reflections reveal a key limitation of the original anchor framework: its presumption of stable, singular orientations. While some participants clearly leaned toward particular values—such as expertise, balance, or growth—these orientations were almost always embedded in broader constellations of meaning. Employees rarely spoke of one career driver to the exclusion of others. Instead, they constructed lived anchor configurations—contextual, relational, and adaptive expressions of what mattered to them professionally.

In this sense, career values were not psychological traits to be "discovered," but positionings that reflected individuals' roles within a structured and evaluative environment. This insight pointed toward two analytical needs in the quantitative phase: first, to test whether the anchor model itself held empirically in this organizational setting; and second, to explore whether co-occurring anchor pairings—especially combinations involving expertise, stability, and lifestyle—could be identified as meaningful identity structures in their own right.

Quantitative Research Findings

Survey Design and Participant Overview

The quantitative phase of the study was conducted via an online survey distributed to employees within three business lines of a multinational company operating in Romania, yielding 764 valid responses. Participants were diverse in terms of job level, gender, and sub-team affiliation, with most situated in early or mid-career stages and employed within performance-driven systems characterized by structured evaluations and clear role progression. The instrument included Schein's Career Orientation Inventory (COI), comprising 40 items designed to capture individual orientations toward career success and fulfillment, to which several other questions about job satisfaction and organizational culture were added.

The Factor Structure of Career Anchors

To explore how Schein's anchors were expressed in this context, an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted using principal axis factoring with oblique rotation (Oblimin), appropriate given the theoretical expectation that career motivations are interrelated. The analysis yielded a nine-factor solution, closely aligned with Schein's original typology but also revealing meaningful divergences. The Pattern Matrix appears in Appendix 1.

Most of the classic anchors—including General Managerial, Autonomy, Lifestyle, Service, Security, Entrepreneurial Creativity, and Pure Challenge—emerged as coherent and interpretable factors. However, the Technical/Functional Competence anchor did not appear as a unified construct. Instead, its items were dispersed across several factors, suggesting a fragmentation of this traditional category. In contrast, one particular item—"I dream of being so good at what I do that my expert advice will be sought continually" (item 1)—loaded consistently and strongly onto a distinct factor, independent from the technical, managerial, or autonomy-related constructs. This factor was interpreted as representing a unique form of 'Expertise'—one centered not on job content per se, but on the pursuit of recognized mastery, trusted authority, and professional legitimacy.

The table in Appendix 2 summarizes the correspondence between Schein's original anchors and the empirical structure that emerged. This empirical structure suggests that while Schein's framework remains largely robust, the language and logic of career identity in this setting may be undergoing subtle transformation. Specifically, recognition as an expert appears to operate as a distinct and central aspiration—one no longer embedded solely in functional mastery, but tied to visibility, esteem, and internal legitimacy.

Anchor Distribution and Patterns of Dominance

To examine how these anchors were distributed at the level of individual respondents, both mean scores per anchor and dominant anchor patterns were analyzed.

Across the sample, the highest average score was recorded for the Expertise anchor (M = 4.94, SD = 0.68), followed by Lifestyle/Balance (M = 4.58), Service to a Cause (M = 4.39), and Security/Stability (M = 4.38). Anchors traditionally associated with advancement or self-direction—such as Entrepreneurial Creativity and General Managerial—received notably lower average scores.

When considering each respondent's highest-scoring anchor, 53.2% identified Expertise as their dominant orientation, followed by Lifestyle (20.7%) and Service (13.1%). Only a small minority were primarily anchored in Entrepreneurial Creativity (2.4%) or General Managerial ambition (2.6%).

These trends held when examining respondents' top two anchors. Expertise remained the most frequently cited (66.4%), typically combined with either Lifestyle (43.6%), Security (33.9%), or Service (30.3%). These pairings reflect how the pursuit of mastery is often situated within broader commitments to stability, personal boundaries, and contribution.

Interpreting the Quantitative Results

Taken together, the quantitative findings affirm the continued relevance of Schein's model while also pointing to shifts in how career meaning is constructed. The fragmentation of the Technical/Functional anchor and the emergence of a separate "Expertise" dimension suggest that mastery is now perceived less in terms of job-specific skill and more in terms of recognized trustworthiness, autonomy within constraint, and internal authority. These observations echo and enrich insights from the qualitative phase, which highlighted how internal validation and perceived value to the organization often underpin participants' career narratives.

In sum, the data supports a model in which hybrid anchor configurations are not exceptions but norms. Career orientation appears to be built through the dynamic interplay between aspirations for competence, contribution, stability, and self-alignment—rather than through exclusive identification with one anchor alone.

Discussion

This study set out to explore how employees in a multinational technology firm construct their career values within the constraints and possibilities of a structured organizational environment. From the outset, the qualitative phase revealed a recurring tension in participants' narratives—between the aspiration to be recognized as competent, trusted professionals, and the desire for stability and long-term clarity. What became apparent, however, was that this tension did not produce conflict. Instead, these two orientations—expertise and security—were often seen as complementary, even mutually reinforcing. Employees did not experience a need to choose between ambition and stability; many described the latter as something they had earned through sustained contribution and institutional trust.

These insights provided the groundwork for the quantitative phase, which tested the extent to which such patterns were consistent across the organization. The factor analysis supported a revised nine-anchor model. Crucially, it confirmed that "expertise," understood not simply as technical competence but as recognized authority and symbolic legitimacy, formed an empirically distinct dimension of career orientation. It also showed that hybrid identities—most notably combinations of expertise with security or lifestyle anchors—were widespread and not experienced as ambivalent or transitional. On the contrary, they appeared to represent coherent, situated identities that aligned well with the organization's internal logic and evaluation systems.

This interplay between empirical findings and conceptual framing invites a reconsideration of how career anchors are understood. Rather than viewing them as stable personality traits, the evidence here suggests that anchors are symbolic positions—constructed over time through individuals' engagement with institutional narratives, reward structures, and recognition practices. The emphasis participants placed on being "known," "trusted," or "called upon" speaks to a logic of career legitimacy that is less about market mobility or individual autonomy, and more about embedded value and internal validation. These meanings do not emerge in a vacuum but are shaped by the specific structures and cultures of the workplace. Career orientations, in this sense, are not just chosen—they are cultivated, made possible, and made meaningful by the institutional contexts in which people work.

One of the clearest contributions of this study is the reframing of security—not as an expression of inertia or risk aversion, but as a legitimate and earned position. Participants frequently described their sense of stability as something accumulated over time, made possible by competence, trust, and

continuity within the organization. Rather than representing a retreat from ambition, security was often narrated as its reward. This challenges the widely held assumption in protean and boundaryless career models that flexibility and self-direction are the primary markers of success, while stability is a defensive fallback. Instead, what emerges here is a view in which security and initiative are not opposed but intertwined—where predictability enables focus, and depth of presence facilitates professional growth.

These insights are particularly well captured by the career field and habitus framework. By drawing on this perspective, we can understand anchors such as expertise and security not simply as preferences, but as symbolic capital—positions that are valued and legitimized within a particular field. Recognition, in this context, is not merely interpersonal; it is institutional. It matters not just that someone is good at what they do, but that their work is visible, trusted, and situated within a broader structure of meaning. In this framework, security becomes a status marker: it signals that one's contributions are not only consistent, but significant enough to justify continued investment and clarity of trajectory.

This also calls into question the often-invoked tradeoff between autonomy and stability. For the employees in this study, there was little sense of contradiction between being ambitious and seeking structure. Many explicitly rejected the idea that mobility or constant change was necessary for growth. Instead, they described success as deepening their role within the organization, gaining recognition, and being able to move internally without having to restart their professional identity. Internal mobility, relational continuity, and access to learning opportunities were all understood as elements of a strong and ambitious career—not alternatives to it.

The mixed-methods design of this study allowed for a productive interplay between inductive exploration and deductive testing. The discovery of "expertise" as a distinct anchor in the qualitative phase was not based on theoretical expectations but emerged from the ways employees spoke about their professional identity. This category was then confirmed in the survey as both statistically robust and widely held. Similarly, the prominence of hybrid anchor profiles—particularly those combining expertise with stability—was first noted in narrative accounts and then reflected in the quantitative distribution. This movement from meaning-making to measurement reinforces the validity of the findings while keeping them grounded in the lived experience of participants.

Overall, this study does not propose a wholesale revision of career anchor theory, nor does it aim to dismantle the protean or boundaryless models entirely. Rather, it suggests that within structured, high-performance organizations, values like stability and recognition continue to hold considerable meaning—and do

so not in opposition to ambition, but alongside it. Employees construct career identities that are shaped not only by individual aspirations but by how institutions define success, reward contribution, and enable continuity. Future research might examine how these dynamics play out in other organizational contexts, or how structural factors such as industry norms and national labor markets shape what career orientations are seen as legitimate and desirable.

By returning to the empirical texture of how people speak about their work, and by anchoring these narratives in both quantitative structure and theoretical insight, this study offers a modest but important contribution: a more relational, situated, and recognition-based understanding of career identity—one in which security is not something to be explained away, but something to be explained well.

Contributions and Conclusion

This article began with a simple question: how do professionals make sense of their careers in a structured, high-performance organizational environment? More specifically, it asked whether the values of ambition and stability—so often portrayed as incompatible in contemporary career theory—might in fact be integrated, and how such integration is reflected in everyday narratives and organizational structures. Through a sequential mixed-methods design, these questions were explored by combining qualitative interviews with a large-scale survey, using Schein's career anchor framework as a heuristic device rather than a fixed model.

The findings suggest that many employees do not experience a tension between striving for recognition and seeking stability. Rather, they view the two as closely linked. The desire to be seen as a trusted expert—someone whose work carries symbolic legitimacy—was a central thread across the data. At the same time, participants expressed appreciation for predictability, long-term perspective, and a sense of continuity in their roles. Far from being markers of passivity, these were described as outcomes earned through contribution and consistency.

One of the key contributions of the study lies in reframing security—not as a fallback for the risk-averse, but as a legitimate career orientation that emerges within certain institutional contexts. In the case examined here, security was often narrated as something that follows from achievement, not something that prevents it. This challenges some of the foundational assumptions in the protean and boundaryless models, where autonomy and instability are often treated as necessary conditions for professional growth.

The analysis also adds nuance to the concept of career anchors by showing how they function not as fixed personality types but as symbolic identity positions, shaped through recognition, institutional structures, and career habitus. The emergence of "expertise" as an empirically distinct anchor, and the prevalence of hybrid profiles—particularly those that combine expertise with security or lifestyle—point to the ways in which individuals assemble their orientations in response to both personal meaning and organizational discourse.

Methodologically, the study highlights the value of combining inductive and deductive phases in career research. The qualitative insights provided the conceptual grounding for the survey, while the quantitative findings helped establish the broader relevance of themes that first appeared in narrative form. This approach enabled a more nuanced understanding of how people describe and structure their careers—without reducing them to static categories or individual choices alone.

While the study focuses on a single organization, its implications may extend to other structured and high-performance work settings. It offers a reminder that stability, recognition, and embedded growth remain central to how many professionals define success—even when career theory tends to emphasize movement, flexibility, and reinvention. Future research might explore how these dynamics vary across sectors, career stages, or cultural contexts, and how organizations can better align recognition systems with the values their employees actually hold.

What this study ultimately proposes is not a new model of careers, but a shift in attention: toward the ways in which meaning is made within institutional contexts, and how career identities are built through sustained interaction with organizational structures, expectations, and symbolic economies. In doing so, it offers a modest contribution to the broader effort of understanding how people seek to be both excellent and anchored—visible, valued, and able to stay.

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Appendix 1

Table 1. Pattern Matrix[a] of Exploratory Factor Analysis for Career Orientation Inventory (COI) Items. Principal Axis Factoring with Oblimin Rotation (N = 764)

	Factor								
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**
23. I have been most fulfilled in my career when I have solved seemingly unsolvable problems or won out over seemingly impossible odds.	.732	-.022	.114	.022	.035	.045	.023	-.008	-.032
15. I will feel successful in my career only if I face and overcome very difficult challenges	.659	-.002	.003	.034	.050	.154	.028	.095	.073
31. I seek out work opportunities that strongly challenge my problem solving and/or competitive skills.	.622	-.012	.044	-.089	-.033	.114	.125	.120	-.006
7. I dream of a career in which I can solve problems or win out in situations that are extremely challenging.	.554	-.028	-.032	-.033	.025	.118	.128	.308	.029
39. Working on problems that are almost unsolvable is more important to me than achieving a high-level managerial position.	.503	-.081	-.092	-.045	.025	-.124	.155	-.078	.386
21. I am most fulfilled in my career when I have been able to build something that is entirely the result of my own ideas and efforts.	.499	-.119	-.082	.226	-.233	-.028	.145	-.315	-.064

	Factor								
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**
33. I am most fulfilled in my work when I have been able to use my special skills and talents.	.495	.129	.227	.033	-.041	-.011	.224	-.076	-.057
9. I will feel successful in my career only if I can develop my technical or functional skills to a very high level of competence.	.413	-.096	.091	.124	-.027	-.015	-.084	.153	.092
29. I will feel successful in my career only if I have succeeded in creating or building something that is entirely my own product or idea.	.387	-.245	-.075	.102	-.214	.145	.100	-.285	.017
5. I am always on the lookout for ideas that would permit me to start my own enterprise.	-.013	-.888	-.006	.043	-.012	.012	.028	.102	-.055
37. I dream of starting up and running my own business.	.042	-.837	.064	-.037	-.033	.018	.000	-.015	-.126
13. Building my own business is more important to me than achieving a high-level managerial position in someone else's organisation.	-.024	-.684	.045	-.017	-.034	.046	.033	-.154	.176
24. I feel successful in life only if I have been able to balance my personal, family and career requirements.	.052	.023	.757	.073	.044	.018	.048	.033	-.178

	Factor								
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**
8. I would rather leave my organisation than to be put into a job that would compromise my ability to pursue personal and family concerns.	.008	-.093	.597	-.074	-.053	-.043	-.055	.043	.151
16. I dream of a career that will permit me to integrate my personal, family and work needs.	.057	.022	.581	.061	-.151	-.011	.026	.068	-.112
32. Balancing the demands of personal and professional life is more important to me than achieving a high-level managerial position.	.039	-.041	.559	.065	.041	-.183	.173	-.173	.071
40. I have always sought out work opportunities that would minimise interference with home or family concerns.	-.028	-.055	.468	.090	.045	.091	.035	.017	.096
36. I dream of having a career that will allow me to feel a sense of security and stability.	-.009	.086	.069	.750	-.065	-.024	.117	-.043	-.037
20. I seek jobs in organisations that will give me a sense of security and stability.	-.072	-.019	.074	.737	-.032	.024	.072	-.017	-.043
28. I am most fulfilled in my work when I feel that I have complete financial and employment security.	.104	-.006	.102	.571	-.107	.036	-.073	-.034	-.058
4. Security and stability are more important to me than freedom and autonomy.	-.015	-.055	-.076	.505	.265	.067	.011	.131	.124

	Factor								
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**
12. I would rather leave my organisation altogether than accept an assignment that would jeopardise my security in that organisation.	-.030	-.033	.230	.253	-.078	.051	-.019	-.050	.182
11. I am most fulfilled in my work when I am completely free to define my own tasks, schedules and procedures.	.042	-.079	-.002	.052	-.667	.045	-.028	.145	.102
19. I will feel successful in my career only if I achieve complete autonomy and freedom.	.055	-.062	.044	.011	-.594	.212	.004	-.087	.011
3. I dream of having a career that will allow me the freedom to do a job my own way and on my own schedule.	-.098	-.202	.085	-.001	-.534	-.068	.091	.163	-.072
35. I would rather leave my organisation than accept a job that would reduce my autonomy and freedom.	-.129	.012	.180	-.041	-.389	.192	.113	-.103	.282
27. The chance to do a job my own way, free of rules and constraints, is more important to me than financial or employment security.	.024	-.217	.001	-.204	-.332	.212	.144	-.109	.226
18. I will feel successful in my career only if I become a general manager in some organisation.	.084	.003	-.025	.101	-.047	.804	-.087	.028	-.033

	Factor								
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**
26. Becoming a general manager is more attractive to me than becoming a functional manager in my current area of expertise.	.062	-.083	-.033	.002	-.019	.772	.038	-.018	-.133
13.34. I would rather leave my organisation than accept a job that would take me away from the general managerial track.	-.070	-.104	.031	.018	-.018	.688	.020	-.027	.204
10. I dream of being in charge of a complex organisation and making decisions that affect many people.	.213	-.093	-.041	.014	-.084	.472	-.028	.390	-.051
30. I dream of having a career that makes a real contribution to humanity and society.	.079	-.041	.092	-.051	-.018	.009	.750	.031	-.090
22. Using my skills to make the world a better place to live and work is more important to me than achieving a high-level managerial position.	.045	.009	.075	.126	.010	-.118	.637	-.141	.063
6. I will feel successful in my career only if I have a feeling of having made a real contribution to the welfare of society.	-.030	-.200	-.046	.053	-.019	.076	.621	.239	.010
14. I am most fulfilled in my career when I have been able to use my talents in the service of others.	.217	.098	.071	.117	-.049	-.037	.350	.137	.082

	Factor								
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**
2. I am most fulfilled in my work when I have been able to integrate and manage the efforts of others.	.101	.035	.068	.074	-.115	.095	.183	.478	-.024
1. I dream of being so good at what I do that my expert advice will be sought continually.	.271	.096	.000	.141	-.219	-.027	.023	.422	-.004
38. I would rather leave my organisation than accept an assignment that would undermine my ability to be of service to others.	.006	-.007	.034	-.022	-.040	.235	.286	-.058	.425
17. Becoming a functional manager in my area of expertise is more attractive to me than becoming a general manager.	.165	.003	.086	.141	-.159	-.117	-.062	.140	.401
25. I would rather leave my organisation than accept a rotational assignment that would take me out of my area of expertise.	.052	-.135	.155	-.020	.028	.177	.022	-.175	.339

Extraction Method: Principal Axis Factoring.
Rotation Method: Oblimin with Kaiser Normalization.

a. Rotation converged in 18 iterations.

Appendix 2

Table 2. Correspondence Between Schein's Career Anchors and Empirically Derived Factors. Thematic Mapping of COI Items to Revised Anchor Structure

Anchor	**Questionnaire item**	**Empirical Factor(s)**	**Interpretation**
Technical/ Functional	I dream of being so good at what I do that my expert advice will be sought continually I will feel successful in my career only if I can develop my technical or functional skills to a very high level of competence. Becoming a functional manager in my area of expertise is more attractive to me than becoming a general manager I would rather leave my organisation than accept a rotational assignment that would take me out of my area of expertise. I am most fulfilled in my work when I have been able to use my special skills and talents.	1, 8, 9	Fragmented; no cohesive factor emerged
General Managerial	I dream of being in charge of a complex organisation and making decisions that affect many people. I will feel successful in my career only if I become a general manager in some organization. Becoming a general manager is more attractive to me than becoming a functional manager in my current area of expertise I would rather leave my organisation than accept a job that would take me away from the general managerial track.	6	Confirmed as distinct factor
Autonomy/ Independence	I dream of having a career that will allow me the freedom to do a job my own way and on my own schedule. I am most fulfilled in my work when I am completely free to define my own tasks, schedules and procedures. I will feel successful in my career only if I achieve complete autonomy and freedom. The chance to do a job my own way, free of rules and constraints, is more important to me than financial or employment security.	5	Confirmed as distinct factor

Anchor	Questionnaire item	Empirical Factor(s)	Interpretation
	I would rather leave my organisation than accept a job that would reduce my autonomy and freedom.		
Security/ Stability	Security and stability are more important to me than freedom and autonomy. I would rather leave my organisation altogether than accept an assignment that would jeopardise my security in that organisation. I seek jobs in organisations that will give me a sense of security and stability. I am most fulfilled in my work when I feel that I have complete financial and employment security. I dream of having a career that will allow me to feel a sense of security and stability.	4	Confirmed as distinct factor
Entrepre-neurial Creativity	I am always on the lookout for ideas that would permit me to start my own enterprise. Building my own business is more important to me than achieving a high-level managerial position in someone else's organisation. I dream of starting up and running my own business.	2	Confirmed as distinct factor
Service/ Dedication	I will feel successful in my career only if I have a feeling of having made a real contribution to the welfare of society. I am most fulfilled in my career when I have been able to use my talents in the service of others. Using my skills to make the world a better place to live and work is more important to me than achieving a high-level managerial position. I dream of having a career that makes a real contribution to humanity and society.	7	Confirmed as distinct factor
Pure Challenge	I dream of a career in which I can solve problems or win out in situations that are extremely challenging. I will feel successful in my career only if I face and overcome very difficult challenges.	1	Confirmed as distinct factor

Anchor	**Questionnaire item**	**Empirical Factor(s)**	**Interpretation**
	I have been most fulfilled in my career when I have solved seemingly unsolvable problems or won out over seemingly impossible odds. I seek out work opportunities that strongly challenge my problem solving and/or competitive skills. Working on problems that are almost unsolvable is more important to me than achieving a high-level managerial position.		
Lifestyle	I would rather leave my organisation than to be put into a job that would compromise my ability to pursue personal and family concerns. I dream of a career that will permit me to integrate my personal, family and work needs. I feel successful in life only if I have been able to balance my personal, family and career requirements. Balancing the demands of personal and professional life is more important to me than achieving a high-level managerial position. I have always sought out work opportunities that would minimise interference with home or family concerns.	3	Confirmed as distinct factor
Expertise (new factor)	I dream of being so good at what I do that my expert advice will be sought continually.	8	Emerged independently from other anchors

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INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS IN ROMANIA. OUTCOMES OF TWO STRIKES IN A WOOD MANUFACTURE FURNITURE FACTORY FROM CLUJ COUNTY (2017)

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ABSTRACT. In the case of Romanian state, the dependent developments under neoliberalism shapes local dynamics of labour. On a local level, having a main investor a foreign firm will shape the standards, quotas, competitiveness between workers. I will focus on two strikes inside a manufactory firm and what their components illustrate about industrial relations. One outcome shows that dynamics between union, workers and employers regarding financial disagreements can have a positive result and the other shows how organizational dynamics that questions specifically the status quo relation between workers and supervisors/ management can have a negative result. Because of organisational environment and macroeconomic context of a post socialist state involved in accommodating foreign investment firms while under developing collective bargaining trough labour legislation, workers have diverse interpretations of these two specific labour movements inside their factory.

Keywords: industrial relations, trade unions, work management, labor conflicts, wildcat strike.

Introduction

The trajectory of the Romanian industrial relations market coupled with the evolution of transnational economic collaborations have been extensively studied in recent years. Whether we talk about economic analyses on Romanian labour market (Ban, 2016) or sociological insights of industrial relations in Romania (Perneş, 2023; Mihaly, 2021; Trif, 2016), the labour market contexts

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were pertinently exposed in their dependence and imbalances. However great the progress in acknowledging the constant and competitive market that international economy entails on Romanian workers, or however successful the attempts to establish a link between macro-structural phenomena and micro dynamics inside industrial relations in Romania have been, there are still questions left unanswered.

My first sociological research was in 2015 when for my bachelor thesis I conducted participant observation in a Maramureș County factory. In the bachelor's thesis I described the manufacturing routines, worker activities in one small production assembly line. After this research of 2 months' ethnography and interviews, I continued to have questions about the particularities of industrial relations in Romania and questions about the workers inside manufacturing industry and their understanding of this work realm. Therefore, in 2017, I searched in Cluj County market for a factory with similar characteristics to the Maramureș factory to study industrial relations at a deeper level. During my 6 months' work in the wood manufacture factory, I had the opportunity or luck to participate in **two spontaneous strikes**. The first strike happened in May 2017 and the second one in July 2017, both bringing me questions about conflicts and labour movement in a factory's shop floors.

The paper will focus on two strikes and what their components illustrate about industrial relations in a manufactory firm. One outcome shows that dynamics between union, workers and employers regarding financial disagreements can have a positive result and the other shows how organizational dynamics that questions specifically the status quo power relation between workers and supervisors/ management can have a negative result. I will also show how the same events are interpreted by workers differently because of organisational environment. At the same time, diverse interpretations can be tied to the macro context of a post socialist state involved in accommodating foreign investment firms while under developing collective bargaining trough labour legislation.

Sociology of work

From a sociological perspective, work activities are embodying in the everyday life of a person. Whether we conceptualize it in a classic perspective and acknowledge the social relation of labour's production relations or focus on organizational dynamics a link can be drawn between social structure and work. Ethnography research in a contemporary factory can be used to understand social phenomena within a society. In the case of Romanian state, the dependent developments under neoliberalism shapes local dynamics of labour. Having a main investor a foreign firm will shape de standards, the quotas, the competitiveness

between workers. Furthermore, their way of responding, resisting will reflect the relationship between their local conflict and macro structure of state's labour legislations and foreign firm strategies.

These modern societies focused on organized work for profit and capital are the direct result of Industrial Revolution. On one hand, this event created the need for new ways of management due to larger ways of production, work contracts and consumption. And on the other, it raised the need to protect and represent the workers in new ways. Scientific management was created by F. Taylor with the specific purpose of improving productivity and worker's individual activity. The work environment and relations became very rationalized, technical with clear separation between workers along the assembly lines. Later, Fordism extends scientific managements by developing the focus around mass production process that includes the workers as market consumers (Watson, 2017). Globalization created a shift from the industrial capitalist societies to post-industrial societies, postmodernism, post-Fordism. Consequently, human recourse management brought an employee engagement discourse that depoliticize and decontextualize the employee inside organizations (Dyer et all, 2014).

Industrial Relations

Industrial relations are a field of study developed in XIX Century as a response for the new context of industrial capitalism. At the same time, labour law as a field was developed to keep up with unbalanced power relation in the employee and employer contract. The focus of industrial relations is the tripartite relation between unions, patrons and the state (Coutu, Dukes & Murray, 2023). Labor laws as a direct result of state decisions can have an impact on organization and mobilization on a local level. Industrial relations focus on this relationship where trade unions are the core of its analyses (Watson, 2017) but also bring into discussion collective bargaining and strikes that outline the employee's disadvantage in particular dynamics. Hence, the trade union studies have the purpose to outline the capacity of translating micro level action into political or industrial matter or to translate the unbalanced situation between employee and employer (Watson & Korczynski2011; Watson, 2018).

There are substantial differences between economic sectors such as capital-intensity and the degree of dependence on skilled labours, as well as in the spatial organization of production and its power relations (Adăscăliței and Guga, 2017; Mihaly, 2023). To some extent, trade unions and particular worker mobilizations are dependent to structural decisions that shape labour unions rights and restrains the individual acts. For instance, the change of Labour Code

in Romania from 2011 changed the employee and employer relations and new amendments in The Social Dialogue Act unbalanced the relation between social partners: trade union and employees' associations (Constantin and Guga, 2017; Trif, 2016).

In a contemporary class stratification and capitalism order, work stoppage, resistance, labour movements or strikes fall into two major categories: *strikes* organized within unions or with trade union members and spontaneous *strikes* organized by workers or without a third party. The institutionalized characteristic of trade union and its macro-structural position can lose contact with struggles from the organizational level (Fantasia, 1988). The understanding of these initiatives might lay in the "class consciousness" that is beyond an organizational collective bond. R. Fantasia proposes "cultures of solidarity" that focuses on specific actions of conflicts as a class action and separate it from the institutional status. Cultures of solidarity are the collective practices inside a specific work organization that not necessarily imply trade unionism. But it implies specific bonds inside organization that covers cultural expression within wider culture, yet which is emergent in its embodiments of oppositional practices and meanings.

Moreover, there are two version of strike interpretation, one entails the relationship between workers and union leaders of labour movements. Trade unions leaders will mobilise people to act collectively to maintain a clear link between worker's interest and employers (Watson, 2018). The second case emphasise that informal and unofficial collective activities will happen without a direct supervision of Trade Unions. "Wildcat strike" is a term used to describe action unauthorized by union, a semi-spontaneous work stoppage action inside a production unit (Gouldner, 1954). Even if they start because workers agree that union leaders cannot act in their best interest, trade unions can have an important labour movement role depending on local alliances, workers conditions and participants, and local policies (Erdinc, 2020). "Wildcat strike" is a type of informal self-management, and it can also contain refusal to work, absenteeism (Boraman, 2017). It entails demands that **transcend monetary subjects**, but most important this type of strikes can become a manifest that threatens to modify **the status quo relationship** between workers and management.

Labour Market in Romania

Romania as a former socialist state and Central-Eastern European located state participated into the Westernization process after 1990. Romania's neo-liberal elites encouraged radical structural reforms for a macro-economic

upgrade which implied massive de-regulations of the labour market (Ban, 2016; Trif, 2023a;). To illustrate the progress of work governance in a global competition we should follow the regulations in industrial sector. Aurora Trif (2008) outlines in the European integration process of NMS (new member states) that Romania, along other post socialist countries, needed to do. The upgrade of industrial relations institutions meant to transform labour law, developments and labour standards for foreign direct investments. Additionally, the Government's interventions in 2011 regarding the new amendments to the Labour Code and The Social Dialogue Act were not for the remediation of the 2018 crisis. (Trif, 2016) but another step towards a universal and neoliberal process. The new Labour Code made it easier for the employers to dismiss employees, increase workload unilaterally and implement flexible working time arrangements, while the Social Dialogue Act reduced fundamental collective rights to organize, strike and bargain collectively. Moreover, her findings indicate that the Romanian industrial system suffered a main transformation due to the ownership changes.

At the same time, the workers interpretations of trade unions roles in Romania are attached to their socialist history and post 1989 union involvement in the new economy. Firstly, unions inside socialism had the role was to ensure the productivity plan implemented, thus in workers collective memory the role of unions was of a mediator favouring productivity. Secondly, after 1989, unions strategies were to participate in economic deregulations either through affiliation with political actors that favoured neoliberalism or through maintain relations with political parties. (Mihaly, 2021; Trif et al 2023). This last strategy was used by a former union leader that serve as a prime minister and had a clear intention to preserve institutional power in trade unions (Trif &Szabo et al, 2023b).

Methodology

The aim of this project is to analyse the industrial relations in a wood manufacture factory in Cluj County, Romania in the year 2017. Thus, ethnography is the main qualitative methodological approach of my study which implies the researcher fully involved in a fieldwork setting. For my research I acknowledged the primacy of interpretations in *reflective qualitative* research (Alverson and Skoldberg, 2009), which means that my research work includes and is driven by an interpreter due that as a sociologist I interacted with the studied world. Social phenomena are embedded in political and ethical context; therefore, I became aware of the political-ideological character of my research.

The selection of fieldwork developed from my 3 months' ethnography that I conducted for my Bachelor thesis in 2015. I prepared a profile for my next fieldwork: a) a wood manufacture factory in Romania b) a wood manufacture factory with several production lines c) an industrial factory with transnational partners and/or clients, d) a factory with unqualified or semi-qualified forces of labour e) a factory with local employee: the city in which the production unit and villages around it.

While conducting my research I formulated two research questions around the implications of the strike. How are strikes conducted inside a manufacture factory in Romania? And what are the participants insights on the strikes? My research objectives are to analyse and describe factory level strikes inside the chosen factory and to follow the inner experience of the workers during and after those two strikes.

My research timeline consists of three periods. In the first period (January 2017 and March 2017) when I created the factory profile that I need for my fieldwork. In the second period (March 2017 and September 2017) I fully engaged in the fieldwork setting of the wood factory RoWoods[2]. Third period (October 2017 and May 2018) I conducted several interviews with employees to have insights of their understanding of the strikes.

Ethnographic description

My first weeks of the ethnography was inside the production halls of Chairs/Elements shop floor, Workstation E. As a beginner I was put in the finishing and packing work-sector. After several weeks, the major client IKEA came into inspection few weeks after it stopped a lot of our packages which started an organisational crisis. A new quota was brought into our schedule and that brought some conflicts among women. Because the supervisors made it clear of our deadline issue the workers raised their work pace. But along the days the products would come back as inadequate to IKEA standards, so the faults were offered in all directions. Moreover, due to deadlines pressure, the working schedule was extended to two shifts, and I got relocated due to lack of transportation back to Cluj-Napoca after 23:30. Therefore I was moved to the "P workstation".

In "P workstation" I worked in the second part of the Chairs assembly which contained: painting, varnishing/lacquering, finishing and packing the wood chairs. The dynamics between workers became more conflictual after the

[2] For ethical reasons, I choose not to use the real name of the factory, therefore this name is a fictional one. The production unit is in Cluj County is.

new quotas were implemented. The quota means the final number of products manufactured in 8 hours by one worker or work team. Each week a table with individual performance would be exposed. During my stay here the flux of production was slowing. **When the first strike happened**, I was in the point 3 and during the break I was inside the production hall trying to recover my energy for the following set of effort, so I missed the actual start of the strike.

One day, the production director announced the forewoman about work-force need in the other assembly line. The first to go, in this urgent situation, was me. Because I was the newest and Nala another colleague that was a senior, but which was the less likely to oppose or comment about her relocation. The "EM" workstation was seen by the P women workers as the "dirty side" of the production hall because it requires work with lot of sawdust in hot environment.

When working in "EM workstation" interacted with colleagues and superior that defeated the quota. In one case when I had to keep track of the wood items productivity in the EM work workstation and when I reported to him, we wrote it down with 50 items less. Because of my all-day anxiety of counting wrong the productive outcome I asked how I was wrong. But the **team leader** said that we do not need to tell the real number because we risk having the quotes rise. I look surprised at him and became more surprised when I saw that my teammates were aware of the procedure. Moreover, in one working day I was relocated in individual workstation because of some difficulties inside de EM workstation, and I had individual productivity and again I struggled with counting right the wood items I processed. When the **foreman** came to me to ask me the number, he also cut it by 100 items. He did not give me explanations; he just filled the report paper and went along. Shortly after, a woman next to me said that I did too many items for such a short amount of time, so he reduced the number for our own good.

The second strike was organised here (EM workstation) and when we were told about the forthcoming strike, the woman told us how the young supervisor scolded her without taking into considering her seniority at warm wood presses. Indeed, among workers this workstation was considered the hardest, on one side because the worker needs to know how to handle the veneers with the presses and on the other because the environment is very hot and uncomfortable to work. The initiative for the second strike came from point 1, considered by EM workers and me the most challenging point and where workers are the most entitled to stop work.

Strikes In RoWoods

First strike

For over six decades "RoWoods"s has provided furniture items and supplied wood units for other factories (Romanian or international firms). In 1991 it experienced the shift from national production to private production and transnational collaboration. However, in a 2017 spring day the workers gave a new type of experience that took RoWoods by surprise. This general strike got all workers out of their workstations into the firm's court. Some of them knew what the main reason was and why they gathered, some did not know the reason but got into the crowd anyways, as I did.

Monday, another working day for me and my colleagues on the plant floor in the wood factory. As usual, I woke at 4:45 and at 6:30 am I start a new day in P workstation, one of the production lines. Nonetheless, in this Monday, May 2017 the routine has been disturbed by a general strike that happened in all three factory shop floors: Furniture, Plywood and Chairs/Elements. It is our last break (12:50-13:00) and my colleagues are outside enjoying some gossip talk before the last two hours of work. I am in the production hall trying to find some energy for the next round of work.

At 13:00 sharp I get up and go back to my work point but for some reason the workers do not return in good time. They finally appear in small groups, and they are debating if they should join it or not. I do not understand what "it" is. I listen to the discussion with confusion and somnolence. One of them asks "*Shall we go? The Furniture went*". The forewoman enters our hall production sector and with large hand gestures she tells us to go outside "*Go! The ones from Furniture's went at the offices!".* She says we should go; she cannot join us. The workers, including me, decide to get outside the production hall and go to the administrative building which is located at in entrance of the firm's court.

Around one hundred people are standing at the main door wearing the blue equipment. There are several groups but there is a main group gathered at the entrance that demands to talk with the employer. In the main group, I recognize a former foreman (team supervisor with whom I previously worked in another production line) who I found out is a union leader. It looks like he is one of the main speakers. The owner of the factory comes down in the crowd and starts talking with his employees. He seems overwhelmed with the crowd and says that he cannot have a discussion with so many people, therefore we should have some volunteers that will go and continue the discussion in the conference room above the canteen with him and Human Recourses manager. Workers start to volunteer, and I hear the union leader encouraging people to

join it assuring them that nobody will fire them. Also, a woman says, "*A man should go*" and my feminist spirit cringes, but I slightly recover when I see one woman joining the group. About 10 people volunteered to join the employer and HR director for discussing the reasons of this strike. Meanwhile the other workers remain in the factory court waiting for the outcome.

It's around 2 pm and the sun is shining over the employees making them to look after shades under which to wait the end of the meeting. People talk about the reasons of the strike: the leaves, work conditions, the new quota, the wages but the main reason that triggered today's strike was the *cut off the holiday bonuses*. The cut off was announced last Friday and before this one, the Christmas leave bonus was also reduced without justification. In the meantime, some of us rested under the Firefighter building shadow and I continue to listen to the topics discussed by workers: Will they (the employers) make us to stay overtime for this strike? Will they cut these hours from our pay checks? Will they cut off hours from today's work schedule? Approximately one hour later, the workers came back from the meeting. The volunteers enter the court, and small groups gather around each one of them. They start to explain the cause of the cut and new approach regarding the wages increases by the HR director.

Several minutes later the employer returns and the everyone pay attention to his words. He says that the bonuses will be reinstated, he did not even know about the cut, and he also mentions that wages will be increased. The patron looks calm and genuine when he says about another meeting, this Wednesday where several topics will be discussed and anyone interested should participate. It is also mentioned that the leaves must be discussed more because the firms have production delays, and it needs workers in the production units. He sadly remarks that we unfortunately lack work force. The speech ends with his request to not do this (the strike) again, because we can peacefully talk about these situations without people interrupting their work. We have left half an hour until 3 pm, our end program, therefore we return to our work units and finish a package for the production line. Around 3 pm, the Plywood trade union leader comes to invite us again to the Wednesday meeting. Another discussion circle happens but I must leave to catch my commute bus. I rush out and lots of questions dive in my brain during the bus drive to Cluj-Napoca. For how long this discontent was happening? Who decided that the strike would be a solution? Who organised this strike? How is a strike organised?

Second strike

We are now in July 2017, and I am no longer part of the Plywood workstations, I was relocated to Chairs Stations on the main line of production. This production unit has two teams because we work with two wood presses.

I am new here and still try to keep up with my colleagues' pace of work. On this production workstation I met some tensions between workers and the shop floor supervisor. The new supervisor's expectations are excessive according to the workers, and because he is younger than most of the workers and he lacks the experience in the wood production, his authority is very low among the EM working station.

This time, the 9:00 am Thursday strike did not take me by surprise. During the ten minutes break I get into the planning of a strike in the EM workstation with the wood presses workers. My colleague and I are resting near our working table when a woman comes and talks with us about how disrespectful was the new supervisor with her today. She was going to take some medicine and the supervisor scolded her, without taking in consideration her daily performance and seniority in this workstation. She concludes that she has never been treated like this in this factory and her team agrees. Because of his attitude they will stop working and we (the wood presses) should join them. My colleague approves and when our teams return in the working unit, she tells them about the *forthcoming strike*. We start working at 9 sharp and I am constantly looking at the warm wood presses station for the woman's signal. I see it and while they gather near the wood presses, I tell my colleague that they have started. She stops our teams with hand gestures, and we follow her to the strike group.

In this second gathering I hear a male voice asking, *"Who will run the discussion?"* and a woman replies, "*A man who knows how to use the words!*". The foreman tells us that he talked with the supervisors but right now there is a production meeting, and they will talk afterwards with us about the problems. In the meantime, we are asked to continue our work until the supervisors are available. I immediately think that this action is not taken very seriously if the supervisors want to postpone a dialogue. The strike group of approximately 30 people does not go back to their stations, therefore the foreman sadly concludes "*So, you do not want to go back to work*." He returns to the supervisor's office and another dialogue between workers begin, they talk about going for demands in front of the Pavilion like last time, but that idea rapidly vanishes. Meanwhile I ask some workers what their main demands and someone in the back are says that everybody should speak up and share their individual demands.

Several minutes later, the two supervisors join the strike gathering. In the centre, the production supervisor and the shop-floor supervisor are on one side and the foreman on the other. The main supervisor asks, "*Why aren't you working?*". He is waiting for an answer, so do I, and nothing is being said. *Not a word*. After a long and painful silence, he talks again: "*First of all, I am going to cut off your meal tickets. Beside that you do not meet your production quota, you*

stop working. WHY?". The group of workers are still silent, and I try to formulate in my mind the main reasons: the new aggressive supervisor, the work conditions, the days of leaves are always postponed. Then I try to find courage to speak up, but another woman starts talking. She asks about the transportation for the following weekend. Because most workers are from villages around the city, their Saturday extra work is dependent on transportation. The young supervisor promptly says that she already asked that question, and he answered earlier that yes, transportation will be provided. After this, the main supervisor starts a speech about bonuses offered for the ones that will come to work during the two-weeks official summer leave and about the wages increases planned for the next months. He ends with "I am serious. Go back to work". The strike is over, and the strikes go back to work. People retreat in their working points and the silence's awkwardness and embarrassment could be felt inside the workstation, at least I felt it.

That day I went with another round of questions in my mind: Why did nobody speak? Where were the union members? Would it have ended differently if a union member had been present? Will this happen again?

For this question I need a descriptive framework that explains how these two strikes occurred. There is a need to find out what is behind these tensions. The next workstations explore the plant level relations and factors that contributed to these events. I will start with evaluating the two strikes (B.) by comparing their components and then I will describe the workplace dynamics (C.) that might have created the need for the strikes. In the last part of the ethnographic description, I will refer to the production line in 2017 when new expectations regarding production quota, work schedules and supervisor's interactions created a conflictual and unbalanced dynamics on the assembly lines. I will single out the management production plan elements that created the context for workers to question and resist to the organisation plan processes.

Strikes in RoWoods: Comparative Analyses

After the first strike I asked myself: "Who organised these strikes?" and "How was the strike organised?". For the comparative analyses, I organised some categories that contrast the particularities of the two events. Both strikes have been triggered by a series of elements that resulted in stopping the shop floor assembly lines and ask for direct dialogue. First strike demanded explanations for the cuts off from the holiday bonuses (a money bonus). Being the second time when the cut off was made without consulting the workers or union members, this strike was organised to ask for justifications. After the spontaneous meeting with the employer and HR manager solutions were

offered immediately. The outcome was that the rest of the holiday financial bonuses will be returned that month. By contrast, in the second strike participants did not enumerate clearly the demands and solution were not offered. In fact, nobody spoke a clear sentence about the claims, but the wage increase was mentioned.

The discrepancy between two moments can be explained both from an objective perspective as in quantity- number of participants, spatiality, timing and subjective perspective regarding the human interaction. Given the legislative employment framework, I will evaluate these moments by *a.* numbers of participants and the workers' demands, *b.* spatiality and timing during strikes, *c*. employee-employer, worker-supervisor interaction during strikes. Also, I intent to single out an essential element that influenced the strike to have an objective result.

Table 1. Strikes characteristics

Characteristics	**First strike** **May 2017**	**Second strike** **July 2017**
Numbers of participants	**Approx. 100 participants**	**Approx. 30 participants**
Strikers demands	**Holiday bonuses cut off**	**New shop floor supervisor's behaviour**
Strike's location	**RoWoods court**	**In the production hall: EM workstation**
Striker's timing	**After the last break: 12:50**	**After the first break: 9:00**
Types of participants	**Workers, union leaders, the employers and HR director**	**Workers, foreman, the new supervisor and production supervisor**
Strikes outcome	**Several volunteers went with the employer and HR director in an immediate meeting**	**Nobody answered the supervisor's question: "Why aren't you working?".**

Source: *Author's table.*

a. numbers of participants and their demands

I start with the most striking difference between the two moments: the number of participants. Taking an objective position, we can use "the more the merrier'' sentence as explanation for a successful strike. In the first strike the number of attendants can be approximated around 100, while in the second there would not be more than 30 workers. The latter got less attention by supervisors and there is no surprise of the fact that the main supervisor proposed to postpone the dialogue after their 10 o'clock meeting. Hence, when all workers from production unit gathered for the strike, supervisors from all position gave attention to them, especially the employer, without any delays.

Also, the main demands were different from one event to the other: one was about the holiday bonuses cuts off and the other about the new shop floor supervisor. However, there is a common ground regarding both strikes claims*: working conditions* and *workers' wages*. In the first situation during the meeting within volunteers, the Human Recourses manager presented his future regarding wages. The EM strike participants (the second strike) mentioned the wages and the overload working schedule that the shop floor supervisor would insist on, but none of them delivered the complains in the discussion with the main supervisor, the shop floor supervisor and foreman. Thus, even if there were common claims influenced the decision of ceasing the work, the main trigger of the strike was on one side an objective matter- the financial cut and on the other was an industrial relation matter- the relations between workers and the new supervisor. In the second strike the major demand is about the basic relation between workers and supervisors which is a classic struggle among classes inside a production unit.

b. spatiality and timing during strikes

Spatiality also differs in the two strikes; one was initiated in the production hall and the other in the firm's court. The production hall contains complex assembly lines which use wood machines, wood presses that creates a noisy environment. Several times, during meeting alongside production lines, workers would not hear what the foreperson or supervisor says. Therefore, the loud mechanisms usually disturb a direct dialogue, even if several working stations are not running. So, in the 30 people group gathering to speak up would mean to shout out demands or complains about the shop-floor supervisor. In contrast is the outdoor strike was machine noise free, and people positioned in front of the crowd could easily get in a dialogue with administrative personnel.

The time chosen for ceasing production activity also differs in the two events and can be considered essential for the outcomes. The outside strike happened in the last break, the 12:50 break which means that the administrative offices personnel is present, especially the employer would be in the firm's

office building. In comparison, the indoors strike happened around ten o'clock, when supervisors had a production meeting. So, it was used as an excuse to postpone the conflict. In the other situations, when workers gathered around 1:00, when all administrative employees would be present, the strike was the first concern because the next work program would start in less than two hours. At the end of each program the foreperson needs to report the production and, in some workstation that I worked usually in the last part of the day would intensify their activity to meet the quota. Hence, having the workers strike at the end of program is much more an inconvenience than workers strike at first break. In the second strike, the production stoppage could be easily recovered during the rest of the program.

c. employee-employer, worker-supervisor interaction during strikes

Both initiatives bring attention to the production plans and managerial decisions. Employee's demand direct dialogue for recent financial cut off or the production plans effects on the EM working stations. Taking into consideration the other elements of the strike, we also need to analyse the interaction between employee-employer in the first strike and the worker-supervisor's interaction in the second strike. I will outline that participant's status differ in the two situations. In the first strike, some employees were union leaders who encouraged workers to collectively ask for demands. While in the second strike, the union members were not mentioned, and the strategy was to individually speak about the EM work-station problems. In the first case the employee-employer relations were clear, and the participant roles (workers and employers) were mediated by union leaders also workers while in the second case there were two fronts: on what side the approximately 30 persons and on the other foreman, new supervisors and the production directors. The evident bridge between two different roles inside the production unit resulted in dysfunctional dialogue: a nonverbal response.

At first glance, I see relevant to emphasis the presence of a union leader or a person with authority towards employer or management personnel who can influence the outcome of a strike or collective bargaining. According to a union leader the first strike was initiated by the union, because the cut off was officialised without their consent, as workers representations members.

> The May strike, I remember I was on a night shift when they called me: How could you negotiate less for the holiday financial bonuses? I looked at the phone in shock. The problem was that on previously Friday the cut off was announced with a protocol that had the union leader's names on it but in fact nobody talked with us. I personally had nothing to do with it, I did not agree with the cut off. So, I called the other union members, and we talked the result: a strike. (union leader, 44. male)

> When the union leaders would have embraced the dialogue between employer and employee the managerial personnel had an immediate intervention. In the second strike, the EM working station strikers did not become a priority for the managerial employers. Namely, the supervisors wanted to postpone the strike because they were in the middle of a production meeting. By this comparison I want to draw attention an essential part of social dialogue and the official mediator of it inside a factory. It might look like the union member present in the first strike had a role of creating environment favourable for the strikers, while in the second nobody took this role. In addition, when I asked former colleagues about the strike and union's involvement the responses said that it was rather a worker initiative, not an active action of the trade union.

> No! We got out. The trade unions representatives said "Do you want to go to the employer? Let's do it" and they came with us. But usually, they do not help much. (F, 56 years old, 9 years' experience in RoWoods)

This discrepancy between some workers understanding of the strike and trade unions leader's version of the strike along with my initial assumption of the mediator factor as essential in the outcome of the first strike sheds light on out of sync industrial relation at a micro level. This layered understanding of the strikes brings the questions around types of managements practices here. On what extent can these fragmentations be explained by the spatiality and logic of the production lines (a classic scientific management). Furthermore, the discrepancy might be approached as a characteristic of the RoWoods dynamics. The second strike lacked dialogue, but their initiative outlines the actual relations between employers and employee when is not negotiated by a third part. An event that resists to a supervisor management does not only brings a particular problem with a new supervisor, but it might bring into question the entire work environmental relation or the antagonist relations between classes.

RoWoods workers and solidarity structure

RoWoods employers portray the factory's community and the solidarity infrastructure**.** The workers inside the working class are composed mostly from the city's inhabitants but also from villages near the small city in Cluj County. The employees would recognise each other from the shopfloors or firms transport buses, but not exclusively by name. The workers are brought in firm's court 30 minutes before the work program. Some of them have never left their first workstation and they worked with the same foreman and with the same machines for years, even if the product changed over time. On one hand, new employers are being relocated along the production lines, while the seniors

with experience remain in the same work-station due to their expertise. The salary is the state's minimum wage for most operators inside the assembly lines. Consequently, RoWoods workers have similar social trajectories (same trajectories before and after the work program) and economic resources (same wage and household situation), that makes a solidarity infrastructure dependent on workers understanding of their common role (economic and productive role inside the assembly lines) inside the factory.

RoWoods organizational pattern outline the dichotomy between managerial employees and workers inside the assembly line. Due to my re-locations, I observed how managers decided the elements of individual work and then engage supervisors to cooperate with workers to respect the organisations plans according to the firm plan. The pattern of the new organisation plan outlines the supervisor's role to justify the new quota- the need for more productive results and to supervise the worker's performance and accommodation in the new production pace – meetings in which foremen or supervisors transmit production expectations (the day's production plans, quantity needed) and individual performance (technological charts). During this process, **several resistance actions** were present in the workstation. Actions such as EM's worker's not reporting their actual productivity or team leader's actions to question the managements logic show the solidarity infrastructure. Inside each workstation I saw minimum resistance that outlined the desynchronization between the rational managements for assembly lines and the manufacture workers. Stopping from work as a resistance to the supervisor's attitude was in fact a resistance to the new organisational plans. In short, workers resistance to new plans highlights an existing solidarity culture along different workstations inside the factory.

These two strikes highlight a lack of synchrony and collaboration between employee and employer or new employee and senior employee. Beyond the local managerial context and workers, the tensions are part of a systematic problem that consists of employee-employer's collaboration. In other words, these tensions illustrate the types of managements, solidarity practices inside manufacture industrial sector. Furthermore, I will engage these two strikes into the wildcat term and the unions autonomy in the workstations.

RoWoods strikes: Wildcat striker or union's strikes?

At first, looking only on my field notes, I easily assumed that the first strike was organized by the union and the outcome is dependent on a mediator element: union leader. As the comparison outlines the first strike was objectively more advantageous due to its number of participants, clear (and voiced) demands,

timing and location. Its success, however, is due to the employee composition which differed, the first being composed of union leaders that from my observation coordinated the dialogue. The second strike was at disadvantage because of the fewer participants, lack of coordination or dialogue. My assumption was that the lack of union leader's supervision and the main reason (resistance to a supervisor) were the explanations to the silent outcome. Moreover, in an interview a RoWoods union leader told me that the strikers from July should have approached a union leader from another shop floor to have a better outcome.

> During that strike, I don't remember on what work program I was, but the workers said that they intended to go to the employers. No, they should have gone to Dipri[3] (union leader from Chairs/Elements shop floor) and ask him to go after the employers. And then the workers could have told him about the supervisor, and he would have fired him immediately. (male, union leader, 44 years)

By contrast, during my fieldwork I found out that RoWoods workers would not appreciate the unions activities, nor do they correlate the two strikes with union initiative, but with a worker's initiative. After the first strike I asked around about the union and its role, and some responses were how they do not attend the workers needs but they will withhold their membership percentage from the wage. I asked workers about the May strike during interviews and some of them firmly affirmed that the strike was the worker's initiative, while other workers including union leaders said that it was union initiative. "*No, the workers did it. We saw that the union approved the cut. If you want to strike, we'll support you, said the union leaders*" (woman, 61 years, manual workers for one year). Moreover, when I asked a former college how she heard about the strike that she missed, she said it was a union leader's initiative. The shop floor's union leader told her he started the strike.

> First, it was Dipri, the union leader who got out. I was not there but I asked him what cause this strike. He said: I went first, because people came to ask me about the cut, to blame me. So, I went on strike. And then the workers went on strike also. (woman, 52 years old, 8-year seniority).

Because of multiple opinions on the first strike, I focused on workers understanding of union role and autonomy. All my respondents mentioned that the union's purpose is to protect the workers: *"The union leader purpose is to protect the workers. Any problem you have at work you go to them"* (woman, 56 years., manual worker for 9 years). When asked to give an example they explained to me the lending money operation as the only relevant activity, because in

[3] Fictive name for ethical issues.

general they scarcely do something for workers. The most appreciated role of the union inside the firm is the action of helping workers financially regarding healthcare issues or family decease. If an employee needs to get an urgent surgery, she can go to a union leader and ask for help. The union leader would complete the procedures, and the workers will be given a loan. This loan will be reimbursed by the workers each month without interest. And for this reason, people chose to be enrolled in Union and to accept the monthly membership cut *because you never know* what happens and when would they need a fast loan. Strikes frequency can influence union membership or a reflection of "higher quality" industrial relation (T. Watson & Korczynski, 2011, p. 301) whereas in the RoWoods workers that do not recognise union action but are dependent on the financial support, so they stay enrolled in the union.

On the other side, when I asked a union leader what they do inside RoWoods he would mention the misunderstanding of their role. He would emphasise their role on representation but instead workers would come to ask him for demands that exceed his expertise. Moreover, the union leader that I interviewed would claim his role of representation but not for all situations, almost he would claim himself as a partial "manager of discontent" (Mills 1970), sharing his responsibilities with supervisors and foreperson. On a particular problem the union participation would be obvious: making sure that workers will be offered financial aid trough formal process. But on a personal problem such as performance and wages he cannot have an opinion.

> What I can do is to fill in a workers complain or something, if a supervisor yelled at him. But the workers come to me and say: I want a raise because I work well. But that is not my responsibility. I told the supervisors to not send workers to me when the subject is about the wages, they're the ones that evaluate them. If the workers come to me, I would definitely raise their wages, but I cannot do that. What I can do is to go to the employer if someone mistreat them. I will go to the general director and the supervisor will be sanctioned. The foreperson would send workers to me for little things, but I am no mediator or psychologist. We represent the workers for example if there is a death in someone's family and they cannot afford the funeral we will help them. (male, union leader, 44 years)

RoWoods workers' general assumption of union roles are to help and protect them, but the first strike is not seen as a 100% union initiative. The unions position and leader's roles are differently understood by workers. The institutional role of unions makes workers to define their role as to protect them in any conditions on a work-related matter, but on organizational level they do not associate union members in relevant action except formal role- the financial aid. The worker's interpretation of formal role's highlights how the institutional position that unions have manages to disturb local actions and

workers understanding of union's role. The macro-structural position of trade union results in an underestimation of actual union leader's actions and a disruptive contact with organizational level struggles.

> When the workers need an urgent loan, they go to the union leader. He will be an endorser, a witness. He goes up (at the administrative building) to deliver the paper. But a lot of workers quit the union because they think they do not do anything for them. But you never know when you need money. (woman, 52 years old, 8-year seniority).

Thus, the first strike is a trade union initiative strike but at the same time is understood as a union-free initiative. The dialogue was conducted by the union leaders who also needed to show that they did not approve the cut, but because of union autonomy the strike is taken for granted by the workers. Thus, this strike falls under the specification presented in Gouldner's first assumptions that formal union leaders pretend to have little control over it but is mostly led by individuals. The diverse interpretation of the strike highlights the industrial workers' willingness to step beyond the bounds of bureaucratic unionism (Fantasia, 1988, p. 112). Even if there was an intention to engage in mutual solidarity, the strikers were from all shopfloors which entails separated groups of people that have never interacted with each other because of the shop floors management. Strikes are an indicator of fluent worker mobilisation but inside RoWoods general strikes means a multiple delimited groups and segmented understanding of the strike.

On the other hand, the second strike was a wildcat strike because it was not supervised by union leaders, and it was spontaneous. Its silent outcome shows that it does not imply essential wildcat characteristics like aggressive approach towards managements. However, the reason of this strike threatens the status quo relationship between management and workers. The resistance to the young supervisor might be seen as a resistance to manager's hierarchy so when a direct dialogue happened between the two parties the more surmised part did not raise their voice. RoWoods managerial structure is visible in this mute strike in which the relation between workers and supervisors is one of power between those who own the means of production and those who do not. The woman that announced our team about the forthcoming strike talked about the supervisor's "overstepping their bounds" (Gouldner, 1954). The July 2017 spontaneity can be seen as a strike at organisational level or a particular reaction for the new managerial plans. Reinstalling my ethnographic description along with informal discussion I had, the second-strike frame sheds light on the actual relation between workers and supervisors. Without a union representative a medium party, the power relation can be interpreted as a class conflict between workers and supervisors in a clearly antagonistic work environment.

Nonetheless, inside the RoWoods shop floors have been developed a defective solidarity. On one side, this term covers the physical context of plant level organisation and the employers' dynamics and conflicts inside segmented work environment. On the other side, this term takes into consideration community experience with individual interpretation and its effects on general understanding of collective or class initiatives. First, the managerial setting for workstations builds a defective spatiality for solidarity among workers; they no they do not see themselves as a community but units along the assembly lines. This lack of class consciousness contributes to the multiple interpretations regarding the strikes and trade union's responsibilities. Accordingly, the second meaning of this term emphasis the defective communication inside shop floors which basically is a faulty translation of workers' collective actions, use of strike and union leader's autonomy.

Moreover, the context of mixed managements and a specific industrial working class (workers with similar trajectories, interests and social and economic characteristics) makes possible the practice cultures of solidarity but in it extend this environment nurtures a defective solidarity. Both collective conflicts or strikes were both shaped by mixed organizational management and governances' system which gives the organizational elites to contain the conflict (first strike) and repressed the conflict (second strike). Therefore, this defective solidarity does not happen only on local level, the characteristics of the working class along with firms' investors demands for products, the workers action during strikes and interpretations after the strikes contribute to a constant flawed work environment. For example, financial struggles make some workers to detach from collective actions. Their behaviour is affected by the threat of being dismissed and forced to face bank debt alone. Also, the superficial understanding of union responsibilities makes them vulnerable in conflictual situation where is safer to settle than to challenge the community.

> We're not united. People are not united. People have financial debt at banks. So, they do not want to go on strike because they think they will get fired and then how will they pay the banks? So, the workers settle with their situation. They do not have elsewhere to go. (woman, 52 years old, 8-year seniority)

RoWoods manufactory industry and Romanian labour market

Analysing the Romanian Labour Code and Social Dialogue Act we can see how workers strike can be legally categorized. In 2011, the Labour Code changed the action of strike; each strike intention must be announced three days before it happens. Which means that conflicts can be contained by the

employers or supervisors in the three days. Thus, neither of the RoWoods strikes would qualify into the institutional framework demands. In this matter, both strikes are wildcat strike due to its illegal characteristic in the legal context of 2017. Beside the spontaneous character limited by the legal amendments, the strike in RoWoods cannot be officially stated as strikes because they did not officially announce them, and the second one was not even approved by union. Moreover, this institutional decision shows the focus on transnational employers rather than unions autonomy, let alone worker's autonomy. The mixed industrial managements inside the factory along with multiple understanding of strikes and unions autonomy outlines the diversity implemented inside industrial relation after 1898 (Trif, 2013b).

RoWoods factory is functioning in Cluj County since 1960 with producing solid furniture and later adding shop floors of pressed elements which enlarged their production. In 1991 the firm was privatized with the state remaining the owner but by 1999 was entirely bought by the current owners. The process of privatisation and enlarging the production series show how the global completion entered wood manufacture sector and encouraged it to get investors. In 2007 the firm established its own sawmill to supply the solid wood to production lines and in 2009 the production developed small products series. The Labour Market development process after 1989 is visible in the constant upgrade of the production processes. Moreover, the economic and political trajectory of Romania can be traced in RoWoods local history. The factory is considered a pylon in the host city economy. Because of classic assembly lines organisation and rationalises workstations the work force inside the RoWoods required no qualification or semi-qualifications. Most employers are from the villagers around the city and that features a particular working-class membership.

Conclusion

I began this research for a deeper understanding of industrial relations and manufacture workers in Romania as a MA student. The layered description of workstations inside a factory pointed out the complex relations of industrial employees and diverse interpretations of strikes. Granted that, the empirical content can be seen from a pessimist and optimistic perspective.

From e pessimistic perspective the two strikes do not represent a good use of collective bargaining or a solid acknowledge of the union's role. The first strike meets the workers' demands, but its lack of understanding the strikes initiation or union leader's role on strike shows a fragmented understanding of

the first collective action. Conversely, the following strike did not deliver the complains which emphasis once again the fragmented solidarity infrastructure inside the firm. The solidarity inside RoWoods is shaped both by managerial mixed practices and working-class composition. First, the spatial and employee's hierarchy limits the worker's communications and understanding of strike use or union autonomy. Second, the workers have similar social and economic trajectory or demographics: unqualified, semi-qualified positions and rural household or they are the city's residence that influence their behaviour during strikes and interpretation after the strikes.

From an optimistic perspective, the two moments not only show the practices of solidarity inside a restricted work environment but also singles out the uneven and taken for granted relation between employer and employee. Despite the unbalanced institutional frame regarding labour market and the Social Dialogue Act, RoWoods workers exceeded the daily routines of resistance and organised two spontaneous strikes. With or without the union initiative recognition, the need to stop work to re-equilibrate the authority relation between management decisions and workers' wages or the relation between supervisor's behaviour and worker's new work pace, the strikes prove the existence of a class struggles and potential class consciousness awareness. I can furthermore infer that the action itself, not necessary the outcomes, reveal the layered and uneven employee's relation: workers-foreman-supervisors- union leaders- directs and employers which also justified them.

The mixed managerial context the solidarity infrastructure is developed accordingly. The constant and routinized infrastructure solidarity is parallel with the constant and routinized, normal conflicts. The workers are spatially separated in working points which results in a segmented community, in which people do not interact with people from other shop floors. The managerial settings bring different interpretation among workers regarding strikes and union's responsibilities. Another effect of this defective solidarity is the defective communication that emphasis a faulty translation of workers collective actions, use of strike and unravel struggles. The lack of understanding the constant struggle might be seen as a lack of class consciousness. The actors inside industrial sector are subjected to mixed management practices that result from a demanding labour market and transnational investors claims. Moreover, the workers that share similar life trajectories compose a particular working class that act within a culture of solidarity, while strike can be suppressed by the subtle disciplinary power.

The unbalanced relations between workers-managers can be correlated with the institutional framework inside Romania. The context of industrial relations based on transnational collaboration, labour legislation favouring the

employer or investors creates struggles along assembly lines which become more obvious when new organisational plans are implements or general cuts (wage related) decision are made by the managers. Moreover, union autonomy and activity can be explained by their institutional role and regulation inside the Romanian Labour Market but also by the specific defective solidarity. A conclusion might be that strikes inside wood manufactory firms from Romania are conducted differently because of mixed managements and its solidarity infrastructure, but also because of the working class. The outcome is shaped by workers understanding of the collective bargaining and union role. Institutional status of workers and interconnected transnational collaboration brings complex answers to "How are strikes conducted?" and "What contexts results in strikes?"

In my research, the local struggles become obvious when new organisational plans are implemented by management or bonuses cuts decision are made by the managers. However, due to management strategies and multiple interpretation of collective action, resistance develops differently. The two strikes mirror the two opposite directions in labour movements; one is standard legal interventions by trade unions relating monetary subjects, and the other is a core critical intervention at the status quo relationship between workers and management. Both empirical cases show labour movements at a debutant state due to context of industrial relations based on transnational collaboration, labour legislations favouring the employer or foreign investors. Moreover, the history of a socialism is embedded in the workers understanding of trade unions and their power; hence their involvement is associated with financial disagreements rather than managerial power disagreements.

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THE SOCIAL ANCHORS AND SOCIAL CAPITAL PERSPECTIVES OF EXPLAINING ALBANIAN IMMIGRANT'S PROBLEMS OF SOCIAL INTEGRATION IN GERMANY

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ABSTRACT. This paper explores the process of social integration of Albanian immigrants in Germany using a quality approach, based on literature review and in-depth interviews. Drawing on sociological concepts of social anchor and social capital, the study analyzes the challenges and opportunities migrants face during this process. Through the cross-thematic analysis it is found that the migrant interviewed resulted to experience difficulties in getting ties with German natives or even to keep strong networks with Albanians. Regarding literature review, this means they have built weak social capital and social anchors, that produces difficulties in their economic, socio-cultural and legal integration process. Among the strongest challenges of integration were language barriers, the process of equipping curricula, cultural gap between Albania and Germany, high level of bureaucracy in institutions and non-participation of migrants in organized Albanian or German groups. While opportunities that facilitate integration resulted in support from Albanian employment networks, social ties with other communities for economic and social growth, high levels of trust in German institutions and meritocracy, German pro-migrant state policy and opportunities for inclusion in the education system or vocational training and lack of perceived discrimination regarding their ethnic origin. They mainly experienced discrimination due to the perception of Albanian immigrants as poor non-European immigrants, hot-blooded Balkans or Eastern Muslims. The findings show that social connections, community support and integration policy play an essential role in the success of integration.

Keywords: social anchors, social capital, integration, Albanian immigrants, challenges.

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Introduction

The social integration of immigrants into host societies is a priority of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and a political priority of many states (United Nations, 2015). According to Guido Baglioni, social integration is linked to a long-term perspective combined with attention to key areas developments like social mobility, mixed marriage, housing, social networks, links to country of origin and differences between time periods (Lucassen et al., 2006: 15). Esser relates social integration with inclusion or exclusion of actors in an existing social system and the equal or unequal distribution resulting from ethnic origin (Esser 2006: 7). The increased flow of migrants and diversity have been accompanied by strict immigration rules, especially for non-European migrants, with the decline of multiculturalism policies, a shift towards an assimilation approach and growing anti-immigrant backlash.

Albanian immigrants are a category of non-European immigrants to be studied in this work related to the relevant social integration processes in Germany. Albania ranks as one of the countries with the highest emigrating figures due to security, economic, political and social factors. The Albanian immigrant community is scattered in Western and Eastern Europe, the United States, and beyond. According to the INSTAT official data, in 2011 were found to live outside the borders 1.4-1.5 million Albanian immigrants, while in 2018 there were 509 521 ones, 10% of whom resulted to live in Germany (INSTAT, 2020: 4-9). After 2015, especially after the Covid-19 post pandemic period, Germany was ranked as one of the most selected destinations of Albanians, with an upward trend from 1.3 percent to 4.2 percent between 2017-2019 (INSTAT, 2020: 15).

The assessment of social capital, as part of the global integration promotion and the Policy makers agendas, is an immediate need of states (Contucci and Sandell, 2015: 1272). Theoretical data analysis suggests that there are differences through integration processes due to social networks regulating social integration and which are lacking in formal integration of the labor market. When the effects of social networks are present, the progress of integration is seriously delayed with the rise of immigration. The purpose of this paper is to analyze the challenges and opportunities of social integration of Albanian immigrants in Germany, through social capital and social anchors assessment. More widely, there will be evaluated social anchors in integration processes; the impact of social capital in the construction of support networks; the main challenges faced by Albanian immigrants in Germany and the opportunities offered by the host institutions and society for facilitating integration.

Methodology

In order to accomplish this paper work, there are used quality methods, based on literature research, including sociological perspectives and official statistics, and twenty-five in-depth interviews with Albanian immigrants who lives in Germany. Their experience will be evaluated through variables of social anchor and social capital, crossed with demographic variables and those of economic, socio-cultural and political-legal integration variables.

There are selected twenty-five long-term Albanian immigrants who leave in Germany. Five of them have emigrated in Germany in the years 1990-2000, five others in the years 2000-2013 and fifteen of them have emigrated from 2014 and onwards. The sample of Albanian immigrants is chosen by referring diversity criteria of age, gender, duration, residential area and economic status. The more diversity the categories of immigrants, the more diversity opinions about their social integration problems and challenges. Fifteen of the migrants interviewed are female and the other part are male. Nine of the twenty-five migrants interviewed or 36 percent were less educated and with low-skilled jobs (public services, construction, cleaning) while sixteen migrants interviewed or 64 percent were high educated, performed skilled jobs, according to the field of study and profession. Six of those had completed higher education in Germany.

The variables used in the interview questionnaire to assess integration challenges and opportunities are:

Independent variables (that help explain the level of social integration of immigrants):

1. Social anchor, to evaluate contact with family and friends in Albania; emotional support from the Albanian diaspora in Germany; participation in Albanian organizations or communities and communication with the Albanian social network).

2. Social capital, to evaluate links to native Germans and other communities; support from formal and informal networks like social groups, non-governmental organizations; participation in local cultural and social activities; level of trust in German institutions.

Dependent Variables (show how integrated an Albanian immigrant is in Germany).

1. Economic Integration, used to evaluate employment status, professional qualifications and knowledge, knowledge of the economic system and career opportunities.

2. Social and cultural integration, used to evaluate level of knowledge of German language, social connections with locals; participation in local events and community activities and sense of belonging and social identity

3. Political and legal integration, used to evaluate status of residence permit; participation in the vote and political engagement, perception on discrimination and legal equality

Demographic variables, used to analyze whether such factors affect integration changes, like age, gender, education, duration of stay in Germany, marital status, motivation of emigration.

The purpose is to analyze the Albanian immigrants' social connections with the country of origin (social anchor) and the host community (social capital), crossed with the other variables, in order to respond to the research question: *What are the Albanians immigrant challenges and opportunities of integration in Germany?*

Thematic analysis of in-depth interviews data, integrated with research literature facts, is used to identify the Albanian immigrant's social integration problems. The quality information is then categorized in challenges and opportunities of social integration processes and the appropriate measures recommended. In-depth interviews were realized in 2 ways: by direct meeting and talking with emigrants and by online meeting and talking with emigrants. The interview's model was semi-structured and its duration was approximately one hour.

Sociological perspectives of social integration

The study of social integration and its effects on immigrants' integration processes, their health and well-being has been at the center of sociological theories and research. Among the earliest is Emile Durkheim on 'Suicide' (1951) and his discussion about the importance of social integration in 'The Division of Labor in Society' (2014), when there were demonstrated how much social integration is related to historical and social structural context. For instance, in more complex societies, the ties between individuals and large-scale social institutions, such as schools, the government, and the criminal justice system, are likely to be particularly critical. Giddens' approach and his theory of structure focuses attention on social practices with which individuals face the constraints and pressures imposed by society's structures and on the ways in which individual actions over time can modify and change the structures of society (Giddens as cited in Pooley and Whyte, 2021: 4-6).

Some researchers assess social integration as a long-term perspective combined with attention to developments in the major areas of integration (i.e. social mobility, mixed marriage, housing, social networking, connections to the country of origin) and the major consequence of the assessment of the links

between countries and the differences between time periods (Lucassen et al., 2006: 15). Some researchers perceive it as functional and effective links between different agents and components of a society or system (Dijkstra et al., 2001: 56). Others link it with the social-cultural integration concept, related to language ability, relationships, rules, values and identity (Matvyeyeva, 2021: 21). For others social integration is a multidimensional concept, that includes behavioral and cognitive component. The behavioral component consists of an individual's active engagement in a range of social activities and relationships, and the cognitive ones refers to the extent to which an individual feels connected to the community and can identify their social roles (Brissette et al., 2000: 7).

Sociological theories range from the classical theories that doesn't consider social factor in integration processes to the contemporary ones that address social integration as a priority. The classical theory of assimilation does not take into account the social context and needs of different groups of immigrants (Bottia, 2019: 7). The modern assimilation theory or segmented theory of assimilation evaluate the process of adapting immigrants to the host society, while preserving values from the culture and identity of the country of origin (Portes and Zhou, 1993).

The power of controlling immigration policy and immigrants' integration processes were more sensitive in Europe rather that in the US, also migrants moving from one commune to another were considered 'foreigners' (Lucassen et al., 2006: 10-14). Thus, approaches such as multiculturalism and acculturation were developed to facilitate the integration processes of immigrants and to develop their well-being as well as the whole host societies.

Multiculturalism is a contemporary slogan and political model that emphasizes the acceptance of ethnic diversity by guaranteeing respect of individual rights, common values and equal inclusion for nation and immigrants (Dijkstra et al., 2001: 56). The German nation was defined on ethno-cultural ties, as a Volksgemeinschaft or a community of common descent, characterized by ius sanguinis (citizenship as a right of blood) instead of ius soli. Then Institutionalized separateness and the welfare state frame of integration parallel to this persistent denial of being a country of immigration, immigrants were nevertheless granted significant legal and social rights. In this way, Germany gradually established a very 'particular type of multiculturalism' (Scholten, 2011). Betts distinguished the concepts of 'soft multiculturalism' related with being tolerant and 'hard multiculturalism' related with cultural diversity and facilitate cultural maintenance immigrant groups (Betts as cited in Marcus, 2011: 91). The concept of acculturation is related to the traits of the migratory and to experiences such as the voluntary decision to move, optimistic expectations for life in the new country, mastery of the host country's language and the capacity to accept external support (Pirchio et al., 2020: 107).

Positive or facilitative aspects in the successful social integration of immigrants relate to: sharing the cultural traditions of the host society, accepting the values and norms of the host society, communicating in the official language of the host country, having friends from the host country society. While negative or hindering aspects of successful social integration of immigrants relate to: discrimination against immigrants, low interactions between immigrants and natives, low efforts by immigrants to adapt, negative profiles of immigrants in the media (OECD and European Commission: 149).

The integration model in Germany

Germany has long been an immigration country, despite occasionally having discussions about accepting foreigners according to time periods and political order. Germany, as France, are known for their assimilation model, requiring immigrants to adapt to the local culture. Italy and Greece have a more flexible model, but lack proper integration policy. Meanwhile Sweeden and the Netherlands promote a multicultural integration model, offering language and culture support (Triandafyllidou, 2016).

Before 2000 there prevailed the integration sanguine model of differentiated exclusion, channeling migration mainly for demographic and economic needs and immigrants by giving equal rights and access to the social system. About a decade ago, the issues of integration in Germany, were mostly framed within the broader context of the welfare state (Scholten, 2011: 271). Germany was one of the last Western European countries to formulate immigration integration policies. Between 1990 and 2002, Germany moved away from the assimilated concept, "following" Britain and the Netherlands "on the path of multiculturalism" (Wasmer, 2013: 166). After 2001 Germany developed integrated multicultural practices into the respective policy. Although Germany has improved policies and laws in favor of foreign migrant integration, labor market or social rights and benefits, but there are still barriers when it comes to legal and political integration (*Council of Europe*, 1997: 7). The "German welfare state model", immigration levels increased due to migration for employment reasons, and German researchers, particularly sociologists, became very preoccupied with the social integration of migrants into the German welfare state (Manow, 2004).

In the period between 2013-2022, regarding official statistics, the mains reason of Albanians to emigrate to Germany were asylum and national protection, (27,9 %), occupation (24,2 %) and family reunification (23,9 %). Especially from the post pandemic period Covid-19, Germany was one of the most favorite destinations of Albanian immigrants, followed by the United Kingdom, Switzerland,

the USA, Canada, etc. mostly for economic reasons, for study, for occupation and for better standard of living and prosperity (Integral Human Development, 2023).

Integration strategies in Germany have always aimed to provide support and develop the skills of immigrants, starting with mastery of the German language. Germany adopted the First Integration Plan (2007) that focused on education, training, employment and cultural integration, while the (2012) National Action Plan for Integration created instruments to make the results of integration policies measurable and to evaluate optimizing individual support for new migrants; improved recognition of foreign-acquired diplomas; increased proportion of migrants in the civil service of the federal and state governments; provision of health care and care to migrants.

Sociological perspective of social anchor

Social anchoring is a similar concept with social networks, but it isn't related with the structure of social connections, rather than the ways to survive in host society, considering that people are socially embedded related with their behavior. In migration studies, the term "anchor" or "anchoring" is accepted as a concept that refers to an individual who finds the corresponding position in society and has a sense of belonging through active and continuous participation. Engbersen has gone as far as introducing the term 'fluid migration' that says new migrants are not strongly connected to their country of origin or host country, but simply seek better opportunities for work, livelihood, education, etc. (Engbersen, 2018). So, one of the most important features of 'anchoring' is their flexibility, interconnected with psychological dimensions (feeling of security) and sociological one (the influence of social networks) (Grzymala-Kazlowska, 2016).

The social anchor theory is a new theoretical approach that analyzes the notions of identity and social integration in contemporary increasingly super-diverse and 'fluid' societies. The anchors concept links the issues of identity, security and integration, emphasizing relations with origin (place, people, culture, etc.,) and their impact in social integration challenges (Grzymala-Kazlowska, 2016).

Social anchoring occurs as people are able to spend time interacting, discussing or participating in an activity that will encourage trust and relationship building, mostly through the development of an overarching group identity fostered by a social anchor (Aaron W. Clopton, 2011). In migration studies this theory is used to treat the effect of social anchors in the process of integration

of immigrants into a new culture, by analyzing their roots with origin country (Grzymala-Kazlowska, 2013). Establishing strong anchors such as cultural and psychological adaptation (as well as work, education, community activities), strong stability (as well as finding a job, establishing social connections and participating in social activities) and community involvement (as well as immigrant participates in organizations, festivals, local activities), create strong integration conditions. While creating weak anchors, such as: lack of social anchors (as well as an immigrant doesn't have a support network and may face isolation and marginalization); changing anchors from country of origin (as well as some immigrants may feel uneasy by the loss of their identity and experience difficulty in forming new connections in the host society) and restrictive integration policies (as well as immigrants may lack the opportunity to build new anchors due to legal restrictions on employment, education or social services), produces difficulties in integration.

In this work, social anchors are used to evaluate how often Albanian immigrants maintain regular contact with family or friends in Albania, the possibility of participating in any Albanian group or organization in Germany and the importance of the connection they perceive and have with the Albanian community.

Sociological perspectives of social capital

The social capital theory is used to analyze social networks, based on the relationship social structure between individuals. Exploring social networks is useful for understanding migration processes, the connections between different migrants and between migrants and non-migrants (Dasgupta and Serageldin, 1999). According to the theory of social ties, social capital and social connections increase the opportunity of immigrants to integrate into host societies. James Coleman proposed a formula, later called the Coleman Boat, which shoved the relationship between shifts in social structure and drifts in reciprocal behavior that indicate immigrant integration (Ochiai, 2015). The role of social capital affects behaviors obtained and what are otherwise called micro factors, intertwined with macro factors of social structure that indicate a person's level of inclusion and integration (Ylikoski, 2021). According to the theory of spatial assimilation, immigrants are moving from neighborhoods with populations from their country of origin to neighborhoods where more natives reside, to strengthen their social ties (Bottia, 2019: 8). As Dahinden emphasizes, the capital of social connections directly affects the power and frequency of integration among immigrants (Dahinden, 2011: 17-18).

According to social capital theories, building strong social capital, such as facilitating employment (as well as social connections help immigrants find work faster); psychological and social support (as well as strong social connections help reduce feelings of isolation and stress), use of public services (as well as knowledge within the community helps access education, health and social assistance), learning the language and culture of the host country (that helps immigrants interact with locals and learn new social norms faster). Building weak social capital, such as: connective capital that can limit integration (as well as immigrants rely only on their community and do not establish connections with natives, which leads to social segregation); discrimination and institutional barriers (as well as immigrants have low social capital, are more discriminated by the host society), depending on ethnic networks (as well as some immigrants work only in their origin community businesses, limiting opportunities to get outside the circle).

In this work, social capital is used to evaluate social connections and frequency with native Germans, access to aid or support from social organizations or groups in Germany, the level of trust in German institutions and perceived discrimination.

Thematic analysis of in-depth interviews with Albanian immigrants in Germany

Demographic variables: To assess the problems of integration, are conducted twenty-five in-depth interviews with long-term Albanian immigrants living in Germany for at least ten years. Five of them have emigrated in the years 1990-2000 for reasons of security and economic poverty; five others have emigrated in the years 2000-2013, for reasons like lack of security, economic poverty, need for employment and family reunification whereas fifteen of them have emigrated from 2014 and onwards, mostly for high standard of living, better study, career and personal development, lack of meritocracy and trust in Albanian institutions, Albanian backward patriarchal mentality and family reunification.

Albanian immigrants have mostly choose Germany because of high standard of living and welfare, by ten of immigrants interviewed; better quality of studies, career and personal development, exchange experiences, by eight of immigrants interviewed; the need for income and employment, by seven of immigrants interviewed.

Regarding education level and job position, nine of the twenty-five migrants interviewed or 36 percent were less educated and with low-skilled jobs (public services, construction, cleaning) while the remaining sixteen or 64

percent, were high educated, six of whom had completed higher education in Germany, and performed skilled jobs, according to the field of study and profession.

Social capital variable is used to assess the relationship between Albanian immigrants with native Germans. Sixteen of the migrants interviewed or 68 percent, established little connection with native Germans and huge connections with other communities. They were high educated, with high-skilled jobs and high level of German language, and described social ties with natives as simply 'reciprocal relations of respect' for the sake of work, sharing common public spaces, children, and various common organizations. They say that Germans are very reserved, cool and selective when it comes to deeper friendships, and they put barriers instead. So, they feel more comfortable and equal with people from other communities because they share the same status of immigrant. Only four or 16 percent of migrants interviewed, established good friendship with natives, three of whom mostly valued German culture and living style and one of them resulted a woman married to a German citizen, who claimed that marrying German citizens gives you more opportunities to get better and faster ties with nations. While five or 20% percent of migrants interviewed could not establish connections with local Germans at all. They resulted less educated, with low-skilled jobs, having difficulties with German language and works mostly with Albanian rather than other communities or nations.

All of the migrants interviewed claimed they received no help or support from social organizations or groups in Germany. Also, all of them stated they have great trust in German institutions, valued meritocracy and appreciated equal inclusion. One of the integration challenges that fifteen or 60 percent of them emphasize is the high level of bureaucracy in institutions and relations. They find it difficult to adapt because of Albanian culture that is based on friendly recognition or recommendation not in bureaucratic procedure or relations.

Anchor social variable is used to asses the connection of immigrants to the country of origin. Ten or 40 percent migrant interviewed, who emigrate in Germany in 1990-2013 period, keep in touch with the closest family members (parents, brother or sister, close cousins) while continuing to keep in touch with Albanian friends, helping each other with opportunities to emigrate in Germany and to find jobs. They resulted less educated, with lower-skilled jobs and with difficulties in German language. While fifteen or 60 percent of whom emigrated in Germany since 2014, don't have close and constant connections with Albanians, except their closed familiar, as well as parents, brothers or sisters and close cousins. They result better educated, with higher-skilled jobs and with high level of proficiency in German language.

None of the migrants interviewed were part of any Albanian organization in Germany. Some of the migrants had knowledge of their existence, but they haven't become part of them because they don't expressed interest or any benefits regarding.

Eighteen or 72 percent of migrant interviewed, mostly educated, with high-skilled jobs and good knowledge of German language, have strong intention to integrate and don't associate with other Albanians because they perceive this relation as a hindering factor in their integration processes. Three of whom have experienced discrimination and jealousy from Albanians colleagues or friends and other six didn't socialize with Albanians because they didn't frequent the same places (work, neighborhood, school, etc.). Only seven or 28 percent of the migrant interviewed, mostly less educated, with low-skilled jobs and poor knowledge of German language, value the connections with Albanians and associate with them in order to find a job or to build strong social networks. These ones expressed no intention to integrate, rather than get a job, earn more incomes or gain better future of their children.

Other variables:

Economic Integration: All interviewees were employed at the time of interview. Twenty or 80 percent of migrant interviewed, assess the strong connection between the education system and the labor market, also employment according to education and occupation. Eight or 32 percent of educated Albanian immigrant interviewed emphasize a gap between the high level of education and lower job position, mostly as a result of being non-European immigrant and the difficulties of the programs and titles equivalence. This results to affect their position in the labor market, incomes and psychological well-being.

More than half of the migrant interviewed have experienced discrimination, not because of their ethnic origin, but because of they are generalized with Balkans, poor eastern people or Muslims. Seven or 28 percent of migrants interviewed experienced discrimination from home renters, at the time they were students. After the Covid-19 period, more than half of the migrants' interviewed think that is increasing the number of Albanians in Germany, as well as is increasing the positive perception of nations for Albanian people, as the ones of hard work, to be trusted with and easily adaptable.

Social and cultural integration: All the migrants interviewed ranked the German language as one of the hard challenges they are facing. Sixteen of them, who also have a high education, result to better known German language unlike 9 of them, with lower education, that results to less known it and feel difficulties even in everyday communication. According to the opinions of interviewers, factors such as poor education, lack of use of German language at work, less

social connections with nations, liberalization policies on language recognition conditions in low-skilled jobs, affect language insufficiency.

Thirteen or 52 percent of the migrant interviewed, mostly educated, with high-skilled jobs and better knowledge of German language, engaged and participated more in cultural or social activities, social activities (like music festivals, food organization parties, Oktoberfest, etc.,) rather than seven of them, less educated, with low-skilled jobs and less knowledge of German language, that rarely or never participated in those activities. They were more deeply involved in their Albanian communities. Eleven of them valued German lifestyle and culture, eight of them said they found it very difficult to adapt and the other six were somewhere neutral, noting that economic survival, poverty, life security or political and legal barriers were more difficult to deal with.

Political and legal integration: Only two of the migrants interviewed had German citizenship, who were female and have obtained it through their marriage with German citizens; sixteen of the migrants interviewed had long-term residence permits in Germany, six of whom had chosen to hold this permit, despite meeting the conditions to obtain citizenship, because they did not want to give up their Albanian citizenship, as long as Germany did not allow dual citizenships. The rest of migrants had a student visa or one or two-year residence permit that was renewed depending on the employment contract. All migrants asserted that they did not participate and had no voice in the country's political life, at the polls or in protests.

Conclusions and recommendations

The main finding of this paper work is that social capital and social anchors affect economic, socio-cultural and political-legal integration of Albanian migrants. The migrant interviewed resulted to experience difficulties in getting ties with German natives or even to keep strong networks with Albanians. Regarding literature review, this means they have built weak social capital and social anchors, that produces difficulties in integration. From this paper analyzes, resulted that the better educated and high-skilled migrants experienced weaker social anchors with Albanians and strong social capital with people from other communities. They claimed that they have built just reciprocal respect relations with Germans, but not deeper friendship, but they try to integrate with German culture and lifestyle. The less educated and low-skilled migrants experienced strong social anchor with Albanians and weaker social capital with native Germans. They claimed that they have difficulties in communicating and understanding

German language and in adapting in their culture and lifestyle. The category of less educated migrants is more risked to experience social isolation and result to have more difficulties in economic, socio-cultural and legal integration.

Crossed thematic analysis of the researched data show that there are also other differences in integration processes of those migrants group. The high educated, with high-skilled jobs and good knowledge of German language are more engaged in social and cultural activities and appreciate more the German lifestyle and culture. They feel less discriminated, were more integrated in the labor market and have e better legal integration. From the other side, the less-educated migrants, with low-skilled jobs and poor knowledge of German language, are less engaged in social and cultural activities and have difficulty in adapting with German culture, language and lifestyle. They are more discriminated and less integrated in labor market and have a more difficulties in legal integration process.

Based on the research question of this paper work "*What are the Albanians immigrant challenges and opportunities of integration in Germany?* it is used crossed information and data from literature review and the opinion of migrant interviewed. The main challenges of their integration processes, resulted to be: weaker ties with natives (social capital) or even Albanian (social anchors); language barriers associated with difficulties in learning German, especially for non-educated immigrants; difficulties in the labor market, mainly in recognition and equating of diplomas and lack of professional networks; cultural gap between lifestyle and social norms between Albania and Germany; high level of bureaucracy in institutions and relations and the lack of participation of Albanian migrants in organized Albanian or German social and cultural groups or activities.

While the positive opportunities that facilitate their integration process are: the strong social anchor of less educated migrants that are used to get more employment opportunities and to build strong social network; the strong social capital of higher educated migrants with other communities in order to increase economic and social opportunities; good practices of migrant inclusion in the education system and vocational training that develop opportunities for easier integration; high level of trust in German institutions and low levels perceived legal discrimination; lack of perceived discrimination regarding ethnic origin; good German integration policy that supports migrants with language courses, social assistance and integration courses, giving a hand in facilitation of their integration processes.

The study confirms that social anchoring and social capital are key elements in the integration of Albanian immigrants in Germany and give the answer of the research question by cross-analyzing challenges and opportunities

of Albanian integration processes in Germany. The challenges remain significant, but there are opportunities to facilitate this process through better structured policy and community support.

This paper work gives a framework of challenges and opportunities of integration processes of long-term Albanian migrants in Germany and it is helpful in Migration policy and integration practices for non-European migrants in Europe. The crossed information and data analysis of sociological literature review and different experiences of Albanian immigrants, is used to give a light to the 'things that needs to be done' in order of common living and psychological being of the whole society. Some of the most important recommendations that will positively affect integrated migrants' practices and sociological migration theories and perspectives, are the need of: strengthen cooperation and social networks between the migrant's group and between migrants and locals; strengthen language learning programs for immigrants; increasing cooperation between Albanian and German organizations to improve economic and social integration; creating more spaces for cultural interaction to reduce stereotypes and discrimination; improving access to the labor market through diploma recognition programs and qualifications and encouraging immigrants to build stronger social capital and networks and social anchors in order of facilitating integration processes.

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REGULATION THEORY AND EUROPEAN INTEGRATION. REGIME(S) OF ACCUMULATION AND MODES OF REGULATION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

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ABSTRACT. What can become visible once you turn the European integration in a political economy phenomena problem? Employing Regulation theory we aim to show an alternative heterodox version of understanding European integration and its shortcomings. Turning towards the European integration from the standpoint of Regulation Theory and its model of critical political economy, European integration cannot be separated from the production and reproduction of the prevailing capitalist regime of accumulation. Regulation theory operates with multi-scalar theoretical models coated in a mezzo-level abstractionist approach. Its analytical force it's doubled by a disruption-oriented approach that offers a reformist critique to the capitalist order as it is reproduced within the confines of the EU. Consequently, the process of integration is structurally constrained by the (supra)national 'institutional fix' achieved by the dynamic historical and material configuration of the hegemonic mode of regulation. Assessing the limits and the contributions Regulation theory makes to the debate around the political economy of socio-political presuppositions and conflicts entailed by the integration process in the EU represents the main aim of this article.

Keywords: Regulation theory, Regimes(s) of accumulation, mode of regulation, integration.

Introduction

Defined by Michel Aglietta as "the analysis of the way in which transformations of social relations create new economic and non-economic forms, organised in structures that reproduce a determining structure, the

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mode of production, hence an analysis of capitalism and its transformations" (as cited in Boyer, 2002:1), regulation theory offers an examination of geographical and historical variations in the institutional and dynamic historical configurations featured by capitalist economies. The Regulationist approach is skewed towards a historical and critical framework that offers a valuable alternative interpretation to mainstream integration theory calling into question the state-market separation, predicated upon a more structural one between the economic and the political. If "relations of production take the form of particular juridical and political relations - modes of domination and coercion, forms of property and social organisation - which are not mere secondary reflexes, but constituents of the production relations themselves" (Wood, 1981:78-79), this calls into question the neoliberal ideological presupposition of a necessary separation between state and market, as the facto are both subordinated constitutive and functional configurations of the prevailing mode of production. Moreover, Regulation Theory called into question the way class fractions, political struggle and political change combine, proposing a theoretical model that follows the strategies of different capitalist factions: import-competing domestic oriented factions of capital, exportist factions of capital, and global financial institutions, taking also into account the structuring conditions and constraints of capitalism (competition, innovation and profit accumulation, systemic intrinsic propensity towards crises), while highlighting the different localised growth models, trajectories and types of development, sites of struggle and sociopolitical (counter)hegemonic blocs.

Turning towards the EU from the standpoint of regulationist critical political economy, European integration appears as an asymmetric process of production and reproductions of the prevailing capitalist regime of accumulation, underpinned by a (supra)national institutional architectonic locking-in a mode of regulation compatible with the socioeconomic and systemic preconditions for capital auto-valorisation, productivity and profit creation and extraction. Assessing the limits and the contributions Regulation theory to the ongoing debate around the political economy of the EU and their impact on charting alternative ways of European Union reconstruction represents the main aim of this article.

When it comes to identifying classical approaches to integration, two theories stand out: (neo)functionalist and federalist. Famously, the former rests on three theoretical pillars: a growing interdependence between nations, dynamic construction of institutional arrangements with corresponding legal and organisational orders, and a supranational legal market order that should replace national regulatory manoeuvre space. Moreover, the historical strength of

neofunctionalism rested on the assumption that integration advances through crises, and focuses on "the dynamic relationship over the long term between chains of crises and integration and the static analysis of the outcomes of a given crisis" (Nicoli, 2019:897). However, given the fact that although it has been highly contested the (neo)(neo)functionalist perspective continues to remain influential together with correspondent enforced hegemony of sociopolitical neoliberalism, new alternatives to understanding integration and the plethora of conflicts and contradictions that is entails at the regional level become necessary. Moreover, the pluralist commitment to managerial–administrative rationality (Lowi,1979) and normative approaches towards integration continue to be dominant in the academic fields dealing with European integration. For example, Diez sees integration as a form of 'institutionalisation of peace among EU member states' (Thomas Diez, 2021). In these accounts, integration ceases to be a socio-historical process, becoming the expression of human rationality per se (Ryner, 2012). The normative, idealised approach towards integrations shift the locus and point of debate surrounding the sociohistorical and economic condition of the process of European integration from any materialist framing focusing on the interlocking political and economic factors to integration's ability to 'overcome the weight of history exerted by the arbitrary power relations posed by the European state system' (Bielding et all, 2016). Given the academic weight of idealised interpretation of the integration process, the rise of alternative perspectives coming from, for example, comparative political economy (CPE) becomes highly relevant. Historically, CPE was tasked with the analysis of the dialectical interactions between regimes of accumulation (Aglietta 1979), regulative framing of production process, institutional configurations and limited state-autonomy (van Apeldoorn & Horn, 2018)

The "Classical" political economy of European Integration

The Single European Act (1987) formally established the Internal Market agenda and codified the objective of achieving the "four freedoms"—the free movement of capital, goods, services, and people. This initiative included a strong commitment to eliminating non-tariff barriers to trade and is widely recognized as reflecting a neoliberal orientation (Grahl & Teague, 1989). The underlying principles encouraged insulation form popular political will and social dis-embededdnes through the liberalization and deregulation of national markets, promoted the privatization of state-owned enterprises, and introduced unified competition policies. It also entrenched a non-interventionist role for

the state - the market gained a high degree of autonomy in relation to the state, as the latter became more engaged in political action oriented towards the institutionalisation of economic de-regulation, and set the groundwork for the privatization of key sectors such as telecommunications, energy, and public procurement. The Economic and Monetary Union (EMU), formalized by the Maastricht Treaty in 1991, extended this neoliberal trajectory into (macro)monetary and fiscal terrain. Central to this development was the creation of a single European currency to be managed by the European Central Bank (ECB)—an independent supranational institution, insulated from direct political influence and popular responsivness. The ECB was endowed primarily with maintaining price stability and controlling inflation, while broader goals like employment and growth were subordinated to these monetary priorities. In analyzing the institutional design of the ECB, Stephen Gill (2001) referred to a new form of constitutionalism aimed at insulating economic decision-making from democratic oversight in order to better align national policies with market discipline (Gill, 2001: 47). Convergence criteria for joining the monetary union included fiscal constraints such as keeping budget deficits below 3% of GDP and public debt under 60%. Structurally, this neoliberal transformation coincided with a broader process of transnationalization of production and finance across the European political economy (Bieling, 2013). Over recent decades, this evolution has culminated in the growing dominance of European financial capital—a trend commonly referred to as financialisation.

Although the neoliberal paradigm seems to have been selected as the winner when it comes to the political economy of the EU, historically there have been contending paradigms regarding its political and economic framework. For example, we can recall the foundational moment of the European Round Table (ERT) (1983) that debated along three possibilities for a economic-political institution framework of the EU and the Internal Market programme: neoliberalism, neo-mercantilism and social-democratic Europe (van Apeldoorn, 2002). Out of this three options, the neoliberalism parti-pris emerged victorious as it was better aligned with the interest of European factions of big exportist capital and its companies. The supranational institutional framework was also called into discussion in the aftermath of the fall of the Soviet Union and the expansion of the EU Eastward. In June 1993, EU clearly delineated a series of criteria of accession for new Eastern candidates: functioning market economy, conditions to withstand competition pressures and acquis communautaire. From 1997 onwards, the 'Accession partnerships' "reshaped macroeconomic, fiscal and monetary policies as well as promoted administrative, regional and welfare reforms" (Bohle, 2006). Integration became coextensive and reduced

to free market integration, thus ceasing to abide a logic of political and social cohesive and regional emancipatory project promoting convergent patterns of development regionally. We can date 1997 as the year in which ERT's neoliberal socially and politically un-embedded economic pillars (economic principles, open markets and free competitions) (ERT 1997) became the hegemonic ideology of the EU.

The dominance of neoliberal ideology and the parallel process of financialisation at the EU level led to the promotion of selective and conditional development paths. The recent literature on Growth Models (GM) offers fresh insight and has strong euristic value in relation to such processes. GM discusses the favored models such as export-oriented strategies, debt-fueled growth, and increased dependence on foreign direct investment (FDI) and capital inflows—models that raise concerns about long-term sustainability as the selected versions for consideration regionally. Historically, as labor's institutional strength weakened, the traditional models of wage-led and profit-led growth eroded. This decline was driven by factors such as stagnant wage growth relative to productivity, liberalized capital markets, inflationary pressures, and what some have viewed as central bank mismanagement (Baccaro & Pontusson, 2016). In this context, two new growth paradigms emerged: one centered on exports, and the other based on domestic consumption financed by private debt (Stockhammer, 2015). However, the latter model—reliant on consumption underpinned by asset bubbles—has proven prone to financial instability (Baccaro, Blyth & Pontusson, 2022:17). As a result, the export-led model became the preferred path within EU policy frameworks. Yet, national growth is not solely determined by internal economic dynamics or by regional structural constraints, but also by the position of each country within broader, asymmetrical European and global economic systems. According to the position each national economic sector occupies in the global value and production chains the spoils of economic development, profit, productivity, technological innovation are distributed unevenly, with strong social and political consequences. In this structure, (semi)peripheral economies are often compelled to attract foreign capital by adopting regulatory frameworks that favor investors, regardless of their long-term consequences for local societies and economies. Among these consequences, the fiscal and economic policies of taxation of Eastern European countries are a case in point, together with the repressive stance towards labour that usually accompanies and enforces these policies. These national growth models are situated within global economic hierarchies, where power relations favor core or hegemonic states—economies that possess technological advantages and domestic markets large enough to absorb global surpluses (Rathgeb & Tassinari, 2022).

Following the 2008 crisis, EU-level institutional adjustments—most notably austerity measures—sidelined consumption-driven growth strategies in favor of export-led models, particularly in northern Europe. In contrast, financial assistance to (semi-)peripheral countries was tied to stringent austerity conditions that led to major shifts in national political economies, including privatization of public assets and dismantling of remaining welfare institutions (Bieler, Jordan & Morton, 2019). In this context of institutional constraints and structural imbalances of power, scholars such as Ryner and Cafruny (2013) have described the EU's Stability and Growth Pact as a manifestation of *authoritarian neoliberalism*.

Schools of contestation of the "Classical" political economy and theory of European Integration

There are multiple schools of thought that challenge the (neo)functionalist approach to integration and the European Union, however the same theories simultaneously represent classic examples of academic marginalisation: Ernest Mandel's (1967) marxist account European integration as a form of concentration of capital in the common market and the advocacy for the internationalisation of the unions is a case in point. Cocks (1980) plead for greater historical awareness and the linking of integration to longer term political, economic and societal processes is another. Recently the gates of dissent have been opened by the fruitful debates about critical and constructivist theories in IR (feminists, sociologists, anthropologists, political geographers, critical economists, etc raised their voices). However, critical here, and generally, does not mean a rejection of European integration *tout court*, but it is rather an engagement with its limits (specifically, the marginalising, exclusionary and extractivist practices of the core-states in relation to the European (semi)periphery). Another type of critique, widely cited and engaged with, is Habermas's (2013) discussion and decry of the reductionism associated to the purely economic understanding of Europe and the corresponding decline in political participation and legitimacy that ensues form this.

To this cohort of therories, we add the regulationist approach - a more historical, materialist and institutionalist approach to integration (theory). The regulations approach criticises the mainstream integration theory that starts from the separation between the state and the market, a separation between the political and the economic (eg intergovernamentalists speak of a dominance of the political over the economic - centrality of the state, whereas neo-

functionalists opt for a dominance of the economic over the political though "economic spill-overs pressures political change" (Bieler and Salyga, 2020) and as a result it fails to theorise the historical specificity of capitalism. This approach looks at class fractions, sectoral capitalist interests, political struggle and political change, while focusing on the structuring condition of capitalism (competition, innovation and profit accumulation, and the inner systemic tendency for crisis) and highlighting of different growth models, types of development and multiplicity of sites of struggle.

Intermezzo: What is the Regulation School?

Concisely put, *Ecole de la Regulation/ Regulation Theory* represents a qualitative strand of critical political economy. It stands against the abstractionism of neoclassical contemporary political economy, resting of four methodological pillars: an ontological constructivist commitment in relation to object and field of analysis and the importance of politics in analysing socio-economic orders; it is time and space sensitive; the acknowledgement of the constitutive historicity of the process of development in capitalist societies - 'for theories are the daughters of history and not vice-versa (Boyer & Saillard 2002:6) is another pillar; lastly there is a methodological commitment to the coherence of the set of hypotheses applied across the medium-duree. It also represents a critique of *homo economicus* and structuralism alike, because "all knowledge is situated" (Boyer & Saillard 2002). In the words of one of its most important founders, regulation theory represents "the analysis of the way in which transformations of social relations create new economic and non-economic forms, organised in structures that reproduce a determining structure, the mode of production, hence an analysis of capitalism and its transformations." (Aglietta, 1979/2002, cited in Boyer & Saillard, 2002:2). Moreover, is is also an examination of geographical and historical variations in the institutional arrangements that define capitalist economies (Boyer & Saillard 2002). More importantly, it is precisely the concept of regulation that is a crucial component of this qualitative approach to political economy, because it unearths the 'contradictory dynamics of the transformation and dynamics of a mode of production' (Aglietta, 1979).

Regulation theory emerged through the integration and reinterpretation of heterogenous theoretical tools and approaches. Drawing on Marxist thought, it emphasizes the significance of long-term historical developments. From heterodox macroeconomics it adopts the view that full employment and stable, sustained growth are not typical conditions, but occur rather rarely. Additionally,

this theoretical framework builds on the methodologies of the Annales school, which suggests that each society experiences economic dynamics and crises that reflect its specific structural characteristics (Boyer & Saillard 2002). Consequently, understanding how different phases of industrial capitalism influence economic cycles and major disruptions becomes essential (Bouvier, 1989). A key aspect of regulation theory is its recognition of institutional forms as mediating elements between economic and social forces. Legal frameworks and institutional rules are not merely passive reflections of pre-existing economic relations; rather, they actively shape and facilitate their emergence and evolution (Lyon-Caen and Jeammaud, 1986: 9).

There is a series of concepts that define this school of thought: accumulation regimes (long time pattern of accumulation between two structural crises, various types of accumulation regimes classified according to the nature and the intensity of technical change, the volume and composition of demand and workers' lifestyle), modes of regulation, crisis, institutional forms (the monetary regime, wage/labour nexus, forms of competition, international regimes, the state) (origin of observed social and economic patterns). The corresponding architectonic of the model is structured as: an encompassing totalising concept, the mode of production, undefined and reproduced by various regimes of accumulation (that vary historically), held together by a mode of regulation that represents a specific configuration of institutional forms, that in the end translate nationally or regionally as different growth models. When it comes to the institutional forms, the wage relation is essential. It ensures the stability and dynamic development of the regulation of capitalism itself in a certain historical period and in a specific national or regional space. The wage/capital nexus is necessary for the understanding of an array of core-systemic capitalist processes: the production process, wage determination and its impacts on productivity (Bielding and all, 2016)

Accumulation regimes refer to historically specific configurations characterized by distinct features of wage relations, competitive dynamics, and monetary conditions. These regimes differ based on the dominant mechanisms of economic growth—some are labeled as *extensive*, relying mainly on the expansion of markets, while others are *intensive*, driven by improvements in productivity. Furthermore, accumulation regimes can be analyzed along different dimensions, such as their degree of *introversion* or *extraversion*—that is, whether economic activity is oriented inward toward a self-contained social system or outward toward interactions with external entities. They can also be classified as *productive* or *fictitious*, with the latter referring to forms of accumulation centered around financial speculation. Importantly, the regulation of

any accumulation regime is inherently temporary and ultimately gives way to major disruptions, often culminating in significant financial crises. Bielding (2016) indicated clearly the specific feature of the accumulation regime and what distinguishes it from a mode of regulation entered around the systemic capacity of disruption entailed by a crisis: small ones occur at the level of the modes of regulation and can be overcome, while a crisis that occurs at the level of the regime of accumulation entails the creation of a new mode of regulation in red to restart the engines of dynamic accumulation (Bielding 2016).

When it comes to the mode of regulation, the concept emphasizes the ongoing and active state managed effort to manage imbalances in everyday economic life, while also acknowledging that institutional mechanisms designed to regulate these imbalances are inherently partial and limited in reach and scope of action. The effectiveness of a particular mode of regulation can only be assessed retrospectively, through practical experience. Unlike neoclassical economics, which is centered on the idea of *static* equilibrium, the mode of regulation approach focuses on *dynamic* processes that continually address the disequilibria, contradictions and crises generated by capital accumulation. Rather than treating markets as isolated mechanisms, it places them within a broader institutional context, thus socio-political re-embedding them, and embraces a contextual and situated rationality modelled by a intricate fabric of social institutions to which it is also accountable. Modes of regulation vary significantly across historical periods and geographical settings, rejecting the notion of a universal general equilibrium model (Boyer and Yamada, 2000). They involve a combination of practices, behaviors, and institutional arrangements that together (re)produce social relations in a way that aligns with a given accumulation regime. Importantly, this coordination occurs without requiring economic actors to fully understand or internalize the totalizing logic of the system—they simply act within a framework that ensures coherence among decentralized decisions. When a mode of regulation successfully stabilizes an accumulation regime, it gives rise to what is known as a mode of development (Boyer and Saillard, 2002).

EU and Integration as a Political Economy Problem

There are a few key questions that guide Regulation theories when it comes to (European) integration, its relationship with capital(ism) and the reproduction of capitalism within a supranational governed region such as the European Union; eg. "how, given the contradictions of capitalism, is it possible

to maintain any coherence at all? How is regulation achieved?". The answers are multiple, but what results are syncretic theoretical models that combine critical and heterodox political economy with a form of historical materialism that became influent especially since the beginning of the '90s. Van Apeldoorn, Horn, Bieler, Carfuny, Ryner, Jessop, Overbeek - a predominance of the Amsterdam branch of Regulationist Theory can be observed, have produced analyses of the social purpose and consequences of integration read on the background of wider restructuring processes taking place within global political economy, with a "disruption-oriented approach" of capitalist contestation (Bieler, Salyga, 2021).

The historical regulationist approach is predicated upon a deeper critical turn in social sciences that reads critical theories as political theories (Ian Manners 2007). The interest of scholarship in the contextual nature of knowledge - a sociological approach to disciplinary fields of knowledge, translates as critical inquiry into the preconceptions about historical reality, assumptions about the functioning of political systems and their institutional architecture, spilling into a sociological critique of hegemonic economic rationalities and dominant methodologies. A refusal to accept the immutability and the neutrality of prevailing political economic orders (Cafruny, Martin, Talani, 2016) ensues, followed by the theoretization of sociohistorical conditions of knowledge production and creation of academic knowledge itself. The dialectical relationship between politics and economics (Wood 1981) and the social embeddedness of markets (Kay 2003) negates the prevalent doxa of neoclassical political economy that markets are neutral and technical constructs, thus there is also a very problematic axiological 'neutrality?' of theories that claim that they are in fact so.

Regulationist research into the history of the constitution and the contraction of the European Union (Apeldoorn 2013) poignantly proves the dialectical intricacies between the economic and the political orders, between factions of capital and sectoral capitalist interests and the conflict between conflicting class projects underpinning the creation of the EU. For Apeldoorn, the creation of the EU is but a long process of 'transnational capitalist class formation', benefiting globally exporting factions of capital based in the EU, thus casting European integration as nothing more than a 'undiluted neoliberal project': "The essence of this hegemonic class project has been the creation of a transnational space for capital in which the latter's rule is established precisely by preserving the formal sovereignty of the member states while subordinating their democratic governance to the dictates of the single market" (Apeldoorn, 2013:189).

While national models of capitalist development within Europe have maintained distinct characteristics, historically distinctions such as Mediterranean vs. Northern economic models, dirigiste vs liberalised politics of economy etc—and in some cases, these differences have even deepened due to the continent's uneven economic structure—the integration process calcified in the Maastricht era has led to a notable structural alignment among member states and convergence in terms of preferred pattern of development, mode of regulation and assigned function in the totalising regime of production. This convergence, which leans toward market-liberal forms of competition-oriented governance, has been driven not only by domestic developments but also by transnational political dynamics. The rising influence of European transnational capital played a central role in this transformation, shaping policy agendas through a realignment of social forces. Again, here GM literature come to aid the Regulationist perspective offering a sharp insight into how this dynamic of social forces materialises historically. Employing the terminology of hierarchically structured sociopolitical growth coalitions it becomes clear how the weight of economic power endowed through the (re)production of a certain growth model translates as construction of hegemonic social blocs and the alliances or conflict that ensue with subordinated and contesting social categories or classes . Primarily, the political and social demands of the *dominant* members of national economic growth coalition are those that matter most for the final response to a socioeconomic situație as the growth coalition is shaped by the prevailing growth model. There are broader "constellations of sectoral and class interests that are organized in hierarchical manner, with certain components of the growth coalition being privileged relative to others" (Baccaro and Pontusson 2023: 3). In this conceptualization, there is only one dominant growth coalition in any given time and space and within that coalition the owners and managers of important capitalist factions (domestic and multinational) in sectors that are key to the regime tend to occupy a privileged position. Other coalition members (say, workers in the export sector) may be included in attempts to extend the coalition and some capitalist factions may be excluded but only to the extent that circumstantial alliances does not challenge the factions that are systematically important to the growth engines of the economy. In relation to this, we can state that european integration itself provided a platform that, especially in the wake of the Fordist crisis, enabled the gradual adoption—sometimes overtly—of the interests and perspectives of transnational capital. These evolving dynamics can be interpreted as a form of tactical political action geared towards the realization of a particular accumulation strategy.

A clear example of this shift occurred in 1979 with the establishment of the European Monetary System (EMS), which was designed to facilitate intra-European trade and promote a low-inflation economic framework. In efforts to address what was termed 'eurosclerosis,' (coined by Herbet Giersch in 1970's) influential transnational organizations such as the European Round Table of Industrialists (ERT) took an active role in shaping and advocating for the Single Market initiative (van Apeldoorn, 2002). This trend continued into the 1990s, when European integration was revitalized along liberal market lines. Alongside successive rounds of EU enlargement, the ordoliberal architecture of the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) reinforced market integration across borders (McNamara, 1998; Verdun, 2000). Further steps included the 1998 launch of the Financial Services Action Plan (FSAP) and the introduction of the Lisbon Strategy in 2000, which linked financial market integration with the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) and structural reforms in welfare systems (Bielding, 2003). These policy developments were consistently framed by a broader discourse emphasizing the urgency of boosting Europe's global competitiveness (van Apeldoorn, 2002).

The current paradigmatic shift within neoliberalism - financialisation has a strong impact on European integration, that has come to be coextensive with competition and a restrictive monetary and fiscal policy intensified and enshrined by a supranational imposed institutional and regulatory constraints (Bielding 2016). New hegemonic heterogenous blocs have risen to the top: comprised of market-liberal experts, think tanks, journalists and associations of transnational industrial and financial capital. Following Stephen Gill, Bielding et all (2016) also speak of a 'new constitutionalism' institutionalising strong property rights, investor freedoms and market discipline and insulate their primacy from democratic interference. The repeated reforms of European treaties and institutions – e.g. the SEA (Single European Act) and the subsequent EU treaties from Maastricht to Lisbon – embody such tendencies. They show an increasingly relevant supranational regulation superimposed on given national modes of regulation. (Bielding et all 2016)

Looking at the EU as a political economy phenomenon casts European integration rather as a process of market making interested in the minimisation of constraints for transactions and circulation of capital across national borders. As Majone (1997) puts it, EU as a "regulatory state" becomes a form of authority charged with establishment, maintenance and the reproduction of the market order. There is also much debate around the asymmetry of the development of market and the "supranational policy competencies" for market correction and

social policy: 'in other words, European integration can be interpreted as a process of negotiated, crisis-related initiatives and institutional settlements which themselves feed on the inherited material patterns capitalist accumulation and regulation – of transnational development.' (Bielding et all 2016:58).

Against the normative liberal approach toe European integration as European heritage, regulationist insist on the persistence of structural imbalances, uneven development and the reproduction of core-(semi)periphery divisive dynamics, anchored in extractivist economic practices. Using a middle degree of abstraction, the regulations approach concentrates on a there-fold complex of structural distinctive differences within the EU that seriously questions the assumptions of the integration process: 1) the distinction between predominantly financialised (elite led and mass based/ dependent/independent) and predominantly industrialised accumulation; 2) dependent and independent accumulation; 3) inward-looking, export-oriented and import dependent accumulation, with the accumulation patter of EU core countries as active extraversion (the export of goods and capital) (Becker, Weissenbacher, Jagger, 2021). Encompassing the production and the reproduction of this set of structural distinctions is the overarching process of financialisation that strengthens at the expensive of productive industrial accumulation. In this logic, the economic washing at play in the ideal of integration is called out by the persistence of a productive architectonic divided between core economies and (semi)peripheral economies dependent on import of capital and technology. Three dimension are central in analysing the accumulation regime in the EU: financialisation, the role of manufacturing and the role of FDI (Becker, Weissenbacher, Jagger, 2021) Core economies are characterised by: relatively high per capita GNI and actively extraverted economy, whereas semi-periphery and peripheral countries have lower GNI and passively introverted economy, dependent on imports in key sectors, so, when it comes to analysing accumulations three dimensions become important: financialisation, the role of manufacturing and the role of FDI (we can also add the growing importance of controlling TNC and their commodity chains for maintaining core status). "There is more than just one core-periphery divide in the EU. Both the core and the (semi-)periphery are characterised by industrialised and de-industralised sub-groups. Tendencies of economic fragmentation are at work in the EU. And the prevailing policies deepen them" (Becker, Weissenbacher, Jagger, 2021:231).

The regulation school thus emphasizes the interconnectedness between transnational regimes of accumulation and the evolving framework of multi-level governance that regulates them (Bieling, 2016). One explanation for the relative stability of this system lies in the inherently conservative structure of

European economic governance reforms, which tend to reinforce existing patterns of capitalist accumulation and reproduction, along with the power relations embedded within them (Bieling et al., 2016).

Conclusions

To summarize, this articles has attempted to partially map Regulation theory's representatives contribution to the discussion regarding the process of European integration. We contend that one of its strongest critical point it's construed in relation to the theoretical articulation of the mode of regulation with the accumulation regime. As such, any interpretation of integration and the institutional (supra)national architectonic that makes it materialise cannot be separated from a discussion regarding its fundamental contribution to the reproduction of the accumulation regime - the capitalist order as such, with its plethora of uneven development, social contradiction and political disequilibrium entailed by this- that it embedded in the integration process itself. Regulation theory operates with multi-scalar theoretical models coated in a mezzo-level abstractionist approach. Its analytical force it's doubled by a disruption-oriented approach that offers a reformist critique to the capitalist order as it is reproduced within the confines of the EU. Consequently, the process of integration is structurally constrained by the (supra)national 'institutional fix' achieved by the dynamic historical and material configuration of the hegemonic mode of regulation. Such an approach, and the array of concepts and theories that have been imported from it in neighbouring paradigms of critical political economy and other social sciences can also mediate the debate regarding the dispute between the nature of crises: a crisis of neoliberalism or a crisis in neoliberalism, and how and why does the latter continue to hold. Albeit not endowed with a revolutionary telos, Regulation Theory represents a critical strand of political economy that is user-friendly, offering some good grabbing points in order to apprehend the complexity and variations within the mode of production, the construction of a hegemonic paradigm, the institutional socio-legal architectonic that is necessary for the reproduction of the capitalist order and its economic regime of growth and accumulation, the politics behind the dynamic regulation and de-regulation and the scalar nature of the crises themselves.

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Critical Reviews

Editorial Note:

This section provides reviews and critical reflections upon recent evolutions in social research, with focus on changing societies and current dilemmas.

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BOOK REVIEW

Ce urmează după neoliberalism? Pentru un imaginar politic alternativ [*What Follows after Neoliberalism? For an alternative political imaginary*], Sorin Gog, Victoria Stoiciu (coord.), Editura Presa Universitară Clujeană, Cluj-Napoca 2024

Irina CULIC[1]

Perhaps the greatest merit of the volume *What Follows after Neoliberalism? For an alternative political imaginary* edited by Sorin Gog and Victoria Stoiciu is that it embodies the wish and project it predicates - the coagulation of support for progressive politics, reinforced by a body of expertise that challenges the neoliberal consensus. In a space where leftist ideas are ridiculed as retrograde, communist-nostalgic, and questionable, and the anti-communist ideology has flattened the space of alternatives hailing the left as a failed and expired "other" to market values, this volume and its authors signal the need to build a critique of neoliberalism from the cold, close, diligent examination of its contradictions, injustices, and violences. That such volume could still be published in an ever-fragmenting Romanian leftist space is testimony to authors' intellectual, activist, and transgenerationally minded habitus and commitment to cultivate hope and critical knowledge. Several collective volumes published in Romanian precede it as products of earlier figurations of the left (e.g. Cistelecan and Lazăr 2010, CriticAtac 2011, Poenaru and Rogozanu 2014, Gog et al. 2021).

In part, the volume starts off from and relies on the results of a survey on social-political topics designed by Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES), and executed by CCSAS, a respectable Romanian institute of social research and marketing (see Bădescu et al. 2022). The survey comprised three waves of opinion polling carried out between October and December 2021, on samples totalling 3,666 subjects, aimed at recording the progressive attitudes and values in Romanian society. Its premise was the increasing social inequality in Romania, despite

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positive global economic indicators posted by successive Romanian neoliberal model of the last two decades, characterized by low wage and fiscal costs, downsizing and privatisation of public education, health, housing, and social services - a massive roll back of the social state. In this context, the survey attempted to measure the public support for progressive policies centered on social justice and equality, solidarity, inclusion, sustainability, and investment in population's health and education.

The survey's results however do not in themselves reveal the "massive support for a strong social state and for an increase of budget spending on social protection that offers a safety net and should achieve a decrease of social inequalities" (p. 18). Not only because the opinions disclosed by the survey are in tension with respect to the role of the state as provider and redistributor, indicating various contradictions and multiple ideological realignments within the population; but also, because there is little materialization of it in the public space and at the working place, and little signs it could coagulate politically or be successfully mobilized against a background of despondency towards the political system. Like several of the questions measuring orientations towards the social state that display a certain level of social desirability, the stake expressed in the volume's Introduction, that the "formulation of research-based expertise that highlights the social dis-functionalities generated by a neoliberal governmentality" may amplify the potential "political mobilization of the Romanian society against measures that generate exploitation and marginalization" reveals more the credo of the authors than a tangible reality.

Expertise has been a difficult question for economists and social scientists who were in the position to produce analyses, models, projections, and policies for the Romanian society and/or act upon them during the 1990s up to the onset of radical neoliberal policies by the Democratic Convention government, instated in 1996. Many perceived clearly the lack of dependable knowledge on what was and how the planned economy actually functioned, and what a meaningful notion of market for such an economy in flux represented. The performative role of expertise, economic expertise in particular, whereby it helps produce the reality it depicts, through the practice of actors and institutions that take it on, is now fruitfully acknowledged by scholars attempting to make sense of various historical social-economic and political processes (Mitchell 2002, Ban 2016). The authors of the Introduction indicate that there existed a body of expertise and commentary that countered the doxic neo-developmentalist and neoliberal infighting from Keynesian and reformist socialist positions, and, justified by the empirically identified support for progressive values within the population, they argue both for the necessity and the possibility that knowledge

that accounts for the intimate workings and pernicious effects of neoliberal capitalism "dislocate present neoliberal government projects" (p. 19).

Expertise, or a version of it, "social knowledge" - the totality of legitimate knowledge of a society at a historical moment (p. 33, n.1), is at the core of the brief social history of neoliberalism made by Vladimir Pasti in his chapter. In order to ensure its reproduction capitalism as historical form needs to achieve a dynamic equilibrium (p. 39), which depends on knowledge production to overcome its crises. He credits the first stage of neoliberalism to attempts at remaking postwar social knowledge by a fraction of dominant elites, faced with the limits of capitalist expansion to underdeveloped and developing countries (p. 44), which legitimated the reproduction of capital without participation in production, speculative financial markets facilitated by political, administrative, informational etc. privilege, and globalisation as a means to ample redistribution of natural resources, labour, knowledge, and technology from periphery and semi-periphery to the developed core (pp. 46-47).

Neoliberalism in Romania emerged, according to Pasti, as a "quarrel of capitalisms". In a context lacking knowledge of what was the Romanian socialist society to be changed, what was the Western European society into which to be changed, and how to construct a roadmap for such complicated social and economic engineering project (pp. 33-38), the battles were carried out on the "political-ideological plane, while completely ignoring the realities of the Romanian society, irrespective of its post-communist historical period and stage of transformation." Pasti notes that presently the systemic clash between rival capitalisms takes place at the core, leaving peripherical Romania sort out the ensuing global order and its own society.

Enikő Vincze's chapter provides a Marxist critique of the political economy of neoliberal capitalism from the lens of housing, and an examination of the political economy of housing. The examination of housing as commodity highlights the contradiction between its use value for social reproduction, as a consumption good, and its investment function as financial asset providing capital gains and rental returns, collateral for borrowing, and store of wealth. In relation to this, she also posits a scheme of housing classes, a dynamic continuum of contradictory positions at the intersection of use and exchange values of housing, or intersection of exploitation at the moment of production and at the moment of reproduction. Vincze examines the transformation of the housing market, from post-war state capitalism, to neoliberalism, to what she calls post-neoliberal capitalism marked by polycrisis, a stage where the state assumes an explicit role to directly intervene to support private capital, and the latter to use any crisis situation for profit making (pp. 74-77). She offers a series of measures as a socialist alternative to capitalism in the sphere of housing,

which gives the state an increased role in the production, distribution, and exchange of housing, and greater social control over the housing sector.

In their chapter, Ioana Florea and Mihail Dumitriu give a commentary to the published figures of the FES survey to complement their account of the mobilisation for the right to housing in Romania after 1989. They show that while it articulated and coagulated at national level and developed transnational links, housing movement remained mostly reactive to violent processes of gentrification and infringements of housing rights such as racism in access to housing, evictions, and demolition for redevelopment, and gained little societal support. They argue that although the survey indicates potential support for housing claims - state provision of affordable housing, building a more significant fund of social housing, rent control, just and equitable access to social housing, and protection of the housing sector from financialisation, there are contradictory positions regarding how these should be achieved.

Andrei Mocearov offers a precise and dry analysis of the neoliberalisation of the energy sector (gas and electricity), part of network industry. They constitute natural monopolies, and have functioned as such for a long time, either as state owned or as state regulated private sectors. The change to a market model was imposed by the European Union (EU) through the liberalisation of natural monopoly public services; the segmentation, privatisation, and deregulation of the gas and electricity provision; the introduction of market-informed measures (affordable prices replaced by competitive prices; drop of a set maximum price on the energy market; encouragement of spot market transactions versus long-term fix contracts, and the development of a financial component of the energy market; the decoupling of the price of gas from the oil price; green energy transition exclusively through market instruments). These systemic changes resulted in increases of energy prices, even before the Covid-19 pandemics and the war in Ukraine, leading to "unpayable prices", as gas and electricity became objects of financial speculation. Ideology-informed, pernicious measures taken by the EU, and their implementation in Romania by capping household gas prices and compensating the companies the difference between acquisition and billed prices, did not stop the price increase, but forced huge state transfer to companies. The author formulates a series of recommendations to redress the situation, including long term contracts and limitation of spot market transactions; definancialisation and banning speculative operations; a strong involvement of the state in the green transition; restoring gas and electricity as universal public service.

Ovidiu Goran, Aurora Trif, and Dragoș Adăscăliței examine in detail the union movement in Romania after 1989. They show the support offered by EU and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in adopting legislation favourable

to unions and labour at the beginning of the transition. In tackling the 2008 crisis, EU however contributed to dismantling workers 'rights by promoting austerity measures, translated into the Law of Social Dialogue 62/2011. Romania held to them when EU shifted back by the introduction of the European Pillar of Social Rights in 2017. In 2022 EU conditioned the implementation of Romania's recovery and resilience plan (RRP) to alignment to ILO conventions, determining the Romanian government to adopt the Law of Social Dialogue 367/2022. Attentive to the results of the FES survey, the authors offer concrete recommendations to consolidate the role of unions by improving worker organisation, union leadership, communication and dissemination, and cooperation among unions and other parties.

Sebastian Ţoc and Andreea Gheba discuss the pre-university education system in Romania through the equity principle. They start off by giving a definition of equity as equality of educational opportunity, implying cancelling the impact of social economic factors in educational attainment, and operationalize it along the dimensions of fairness and inclusion. They then show that the system is based on meritocracy, competition among students, teachers, and schools, and transfer of resources towards those who record best results. The few public policies promoting equity have little effect, as the logic of the system reproduces inequalities, benefitting children from privileged families, and punishing children from disadvantaged ones. Education is not conceived as an institution to contribute at ending the intergenerational reproduction of poverty. The authors formulate a series of recommendations to increase the equity of education alongside an assumed redefinition of its purpose.

Tudorina Mihai interprets the figures of the FES survey by focusing on gender as an explanatory variable. Figures indicate a "traditional" gender difference where a lower percentage of women than of men identify with the left, more accentuated in the younger generation (18-34 years of age group). Accounted on a distinct political history of the meaning of the left-right scale in Central and Eastern Europe than in the West, she also brings in the explanation of the lack of substantial variation among political parties with respect to pro-market economic policies or attitudes towards the Church. Women appear to be more concerned by social issues, many related to social reproduction, still these were often captured by conservative political parties in countries like Poland and Hungary, and, as the figures show, in Romania at best they were discouraged to get mobilized politically. An alternative political imaginary where the left plays a central role cannot be conceived outside a feminist emancipatory vision, concludes the author.

Adrian Dohotaru starts from the survey figures too, pondering over the likelihood that the young population may play the main role in ecological mobilisation, considering their social-economic situation and present housing

difficulties. Unlike elsewhere in the West however, Romanian youth do not seem to be more concerned by the environment than the rest of the population. Moreover, ecologism here is rather conservationist, and subordinated to neoliberal projects. Dohotaru's essay discusses several themes as promising for an ecopolitical alternative imaginary to neoliberalism, from the viewpoint of a green developmentalism (improved ecological fiscal discipline, protection of forests, public transportation as alternative to motor one), leaving the larger field of debates around the green transition outside the confines of this chapter.

Irina Velicu and Hestia Delibaş inquire agrarian populisms, in particular its progressive version, through the international movement La Via Campesina and its Romanian local member association, Eco Ruralis. They examine how it is constituted in relation to two fundamental issues, land grabbing and monopoly over seeds. In a context of usurpation of natural resources at global scale and expansion of neoliberal ideology, the notion of sovereignty may allow variable egalitarian political positions, and, as global movement for food sovereignty, agrarian populism can take emancipatory forms, through transnational and intersectional solidarity, forming collective identities around the functional role of "peasant". Their agenda for progressive rural politics involve not only a politics of recognition for such collective organisation, but also the assertion of their rights to land and seeds, and state support for their life work.

On the background of over a decade of study of the phenomenon of personal development, Elena Trifan tests her observations on the numbers in the FES survey. Her work is confirmed by the data that indicate that the individualist discourse is more pronounced among the educated and the high earners, highlighting personal development as luxury commodity. It is falsely meritocratic, lacking empathy, divisive, and punitive.

In the last chapter, Vladimir Borţun takes a radiography of the trajectory of Romanian left after 1989. He shows that neoliberal ideas grew strong roots easily in the post-communist ideological desert, tested only by the persistence of worsening conditions and life chances of the future generations. The Romanian left emerges as an intellectual project around 2010, which diversifies and mobilises around a few issues like housing rights. He blames the failure of the self-declared leftist organisation Demos to its neo-reformism, also guilty of the fall of parties like Syriza or Podemos, while at the same time asserts the impossibility of historical conditions to overcome capitalism, rather than simply obtaining concession from neoliberal capitalism. His message, and the final pages of the volume are optimistic and preach an effort to vigorous democratic exercise: active involvement of everyone, "dialectic and honest exchange of opinions and arguments, from a dynamic and vibrant internal life" (p. 318).

Still, this leaves us with the question posed at the beginning of the book: how can the progressive potential in the society be mobilised? Offering collective research-based studies such as this one appears to be a necessary step.

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BOOK REVIEW

The Handbook for the Future of Work by MacLeavy, Julie, and Frederick Harry Pitts (eds). Taylor and Francis. 2024, 424 p.

Paul Teodor HĂRĂGUȘ[1]

Few research topics are as contested as the "future of work." What counts as work, whose futures matter, and which forces deserve emphasis remain open questions. The Handbook for the Future of Work assembles more than thirty specialists to map the terrain, offering panoramic coverage (or state-of-the-field cartography) of automation, platformisation, social difference and policy innovation.

Editors Julie MacLeavy and Frederick Harry Pitts position The Handbook as "a flexible guide" rather than a canonical gatekeeper, precisely because "there is no single conception of the future of work". The book's ten multi-chapter parts highlights that pluralism: histories (Part 2), automation debates (Part 3), platform labour (Part 4), identity and difference (Part 5), gender-care-reproduction (Part 6), sectoral case studies (Part 7), labour-market transitions (Part 8), geographies (Part 9) and policy futures (Part 10). The intention of the book is mainly in creating a reading material for university courses on Future-of-Work subject spread across a semester.

The Handbook assembles thirty-two short chapters to map how technology, capitalism and social difference are co-producing multiple and, often contested, work futures. Organised into ten thematic parts (not including the introduction and the conclusion), the volume travels from historical perspectives to climate-exposed "thermal futures", threading a consistent message: trajectories are neither linear nor inevitable; they are made and un-made through political struggle, institutional design and everyday resistance. What follows is a condensed

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summary of all the 30 essays trying to pinpoint the concepts and the take-aways most important to current debates. It continues with a personal reading of The Handbook trying to discover new insights into personal interests currently – mainly the future of care work (paid and unpaid, especially concerning the elderly) and a specific work sector (hospitality and tourism).

Contextualising futures (Part 2): Tim Strangleman opens by showing that every forecast carries with it a selective past; visions of what will come rest on stories of what has been and what is valued now. Greig Charnock then critiques the "Fourth Industrial Revolution" hype, locating it within wider capitalist cycles and reminding readers that technological waves are mediated by power and ideology. Jean Cushen and Paul Thompson add a neglected layer to the subject: financialization. When shareholder imperatives dictate firm strategy, the future of work is scripted as much by capital markets as by code or robots. Together these chapters insist that any serious prognosis must combine technology with political economy and collective memory.

Automation re-examined (Part 3): Eleni Papagiannaki classifies four camps in the automation debate – optimistic, utopian, pessimistic and dismissive – arguing that most misjudge capitalism's dual antagonisms of labour-to-capital and capital-to-capital competition. James Steinhoff deepens the critique by introducing synthetic automation: machine-learning systems that can model tacit, non-codified tasks, thereby widening what is automatable and accelerating capital's "postulate of automatism". Abigail Gilbert supplies a six-archetype heuristic to show cognitive technologies in practice, urging analysts and unions to track the choices embedded in design and deployment rather than succumb to deterministic extremes.

Platforms and gig work (Part 4): Al James highlights how women's often invisible digital labour forms the basis of platform growth, countering narratives that treat gig work as wholly new. David Hesmondhalgh and Charles Umney pivot attention from on-demand apps to "non-labour" platforms whose rating, booking and payment infrastructures reconfigure jobs in retail, hospitality and the creative industries. Finally, Kalie Mayberry, Lindsey Cameron and Hatim Rahman document algo-activism in the #DeclineNow movement, where dispersed DoorDash couriers forged solidarity through collective refusals of low-paid orders, showing that algorithmic management can galvanise, not just suppress, worker action.

Identity and inequality (Part 5): across three chapters the authors bring intersectionality to the fore. Bridget Kenny demonstrates how South Africa's platform economy amplifies racial-capitalist hierarchies even as it promises digital inclusion. Melanie Jones and co-authors trace the compounding disadvantages disabled workers face amid labour-market turbulence. Julie MacLeavy argues that access to assets – not only wages – will increasingly structure class position, implying a shift from job-centred to portfolio-centred inequalities.

Gender, care and social reproduction (Part 6): M. Winter reconstructs the "ideal agile worker": always measurable, always on, and evaluated through quantified self-tracking, a figure that re-inscribes gendered divisions by rendering unpaid care invisible. Lizzie Richardson and Daniel Cockayne "queer" linear future-of-work scripts, proposing alternative temporalities that value social reproduction alongside waged labour. Karin Schwiter shows how the commodification of care shifts risk onto migrant and female workers, raising the stakes of organising this sector's digital transition.

Sectoral lenses (Part 7): Matthew Cole contends that services will remain the growth engine of advanced economies, but their shape will be fought over by labour and capital. Darryn Snell and colleagues critique Industry 4.0 promises in Australian manufacturing, where free-trade orthodoxy and extractivism complicate re-industrialisation. The MEND collective contrasts growth-oriented agrifood tech with post-growth alternatives that prioritise conviviality, ecological repair and dignified work.

Transitions and insecurity (Part 8): Edward Yates details how young workers face deteriorating job quality and delayed life-course milestones, arguing for union renewal and industrial policy to stabilise their trajectories. Nancy Worth reframes unpaid work - care, volunteering, household tasks - as a strategic lens for understanding future labour regimes. Paolo Borghi charts the rise of "independent professions", suggesting new norms of rights and autonomy for the self-employed.

Geographies and mobilities (Part 9): Rutvica Andrijasevic, Julie Yujie Chen and Marc Steinberg historicise just-in-time production, showing how temporality and space have been reframed from Toyota factories to AI data-annotation gig work, with synchronisation inseparable from labour precarity. Julie MacLeavy and co-authors track post-pandemic remote-worker migrations that are reshaping urban–rural balances and regional policy agendas. David Etherington, David Beel and Martin Jones argue that "city regions" like Sheffield are becoming key arenas for contesting platform labour standards.

Politics and policy (Part 10): Huw Thomas and Peter Turnbull rehabilitate industrial-relations institutions, insisting that concepts of efficiency, equity and voice must be re-imagined, not discarded. Jo Ingold critiques welfare regimes whose active-labour-market tools often discipline rather than empower workers. Frederick Harry Pitts and M. Winter link automation anxiety to electoral volatility among routine workers, questioning whether conventional redistribution can quell these fears.

Environment and climate (Part 11): Ed Atkins dissects "green-jobs" optimism, warning that just-transition rhetoric can mask unequal burdens and missed opportunities for systemic change. Evie Gilbert shows how decarbonisation pressures in Asian garment supply chains may entrench precarious employment

unless labour rights are foregrounded. Laurie Parsons introduces thermal futures, chronicling how extreme heat already kills outdoor workers and demanding climate-sensitive labour standards.

Conclusion: futures in contention. Across its eleven parts the Handbook returns to two intertwined claims. First, capitalist dynamism ensures continual technical and organisational aspects, but outcomes – good jobs, bad jobs, or no jobs – are steered by finance, policy and struggle, not by technology alone. Second, imagining work futures is itself a political act: depictions of automation, platforms or green transitions can mobilise investment, shape regulation and legitimise new forms of control. By juxtaposing individual case studies with big-picture theory, the volume equips scholars and practitioners to challenge deterministic narratives and to craft alternative paths.

Implications for Research on care work

Across multiple parts the Handbook reframes unpaid work as central and deeply political. Rather than treating it as a residual category, the authors view unpaid labour as expanding; it is used in the analysis to expose blind spots in mainstream future-of-work debates and to argue for policy architectures that value – or at least adequately compensate – the work that keeps paid employment and the wider economy functioning.

In Part 8, an entire chapter (Nancy Worth, Ch. 21) is devoted to unpaid work, elevating the subject from footnote to analytical lens and arguing that forecasts centred on waged labour miss a vast share of actual labour time. Worth treats unpaid activities – caring for relatives, volunteering, community organising, even the "hidden" hours of self-employment – as a diagnostic window on future labour regimes. When jobs fragment and social protection shrinks, households absorb risk; unpaid work therefore becomes a barometer of precarity rather than an historical leftover.

Chapters in Part 6 (Gender, Care & Social Reproduction) links unpaid care to platform and automation dynamics by showing that digital scheduling apps, ratings systems and remote-monitoring devices do not replace embodied care; they simply fold unpaid or under-paid labour into data flows. Migrant and female carers shoulder this invisible work while simultaneously feeding the data that justify further "efficiency" drives. Digitalisation doesn't erase care's "hands-on" nature; it layers data-driven surveillance onto already feminised work. M. Winter shows how platform scheduling, sensor tracking and ratings produce the new "ideal agile worker" whose emotional effort is constantly quantified; rather than liberating carers, these tools intensify pace and extend managerial

reach. Marketisation shifts risk from states to families, then onto a precarious, migrant-heavy care workforce. Karin Schwiter maps how outsourcing elder-care and domestic help to private agencies globalises the labour pool, but locks many carers into low pay, temporariness and weak legal protection.

In the rest of The Handbook several contributors insist that any macro "future of work" scenario – green transition, AI expansion, asset-based welfare – must begin with the work that reproduces daily life. Future inequalities will hinge as much on asset ownership and household wealth as on wages from care work. Julie MacLeavy argues that as care tasks move in and out of formal labour markets, class positions may be determined by who can monetise housing or savings to buy care services – or who must supply unpaid care themselves. Whether that labour is paid (home-care aides) or unpaid (family members), its availability and quality condition every other sector's future. Without explicit policy for social reproduction, technological change will merely displace costs onto households. It further shows how unpaid tasks proliferate inside paid jobs: platform chapters (Part 4) observe that hospitality, ride-hail and delivery workers perform growing volumes of unpaid digital labour: app-navigation, waiting time, equipment maintenance, ratings management.

This pseudo-unpaid work complicates wage statistics and clouds discussions about productivity and "good jobs". The Handbook's policy section (Part 10) proposes tools that recognise or redistribute unpaid labour: care credits in social-protection systems, portable benefits for self-employed carers, collective bargaining over algorithmic waiting time, and wealth-tax proposals (MacLeavy in Chapter 13) that shift resources to households undertaking essential but unpaid tasks. Alternative temporalities – drawn from feminist and queer theory – open space to value slow, relational aspects of care that techno-optimist "efficiency" narratives ignore. Richardson & Cockayne propose futures where social reproduction is central, challenging the idea that caring hours are a drag on productivity.

Climate change and demographic ageing converge to widen care gaps and expose carers to new risks. Laurie Parsons (Part 11) highlights heat stress for home-health and outdoor community carers, while Ed Atkins warns that "green-job" transitions will fail if they don't finance expanded elder-care services alongside decarbonisation.

These themes suggest that safeguarding the future of social care will require integrated policies: regulating platform algorithms, extending labour protections across borders, taxing wealth to fund universal care, and embedding climate resilience into both paid-care workplaces and unpaid-care support systems.

Implications for Research on Platform Hospitality

"Rating disciplines labour" – Customer-review platforms such as TripAdvisor and Yelp are now de-facto managers. Front-line staff in hotels, restaurants and B&Bs find their pay, scheduling and even mid-shift "recovery plans" tied to aggregated guest scores. Any fieldwork should treat ratings dashboards as a core site of control. Interview guides can probe how workers and managers anticipate or game reviews, and how this shapes emotional labour.

Non-labour platforms do more damage (or good) than gig apps. Research has fixated on Uber-style labour platforms, yet non-labour platforms (booking engines, payment gateways, review sites) reorganise work for employees who never "join" a platform. One focus on new research can be to broaden the lens beyond on-demand housekeeping apps to include Online Travel Agencies algorithms, dynamic-pricing tools and embedded fintech that reshape hotel payrolls and job design.

Platform power is sector-specific, and hospitality needs its own analytic toolkit. The editors warn against grand "platform capitalism" narratives and call for sector-level studies; retail/hospitality illustrates how the same technology produces unique labour stresses compared with, say, creative industries. The main take here is the tourism focus: comparative case studies (chain hotel vs. family-run pension, resort vs. urban Airbnb) will reveal what generic platform debates miss.

Services are the future growth engine, but with intensified surveillance. Service work—including hotels and tourism—will keep expanding; automation will come less as full job loss than as algorithmic control, datafied performance metrics and low-wage polarization. Interesting research will explore how "smart" housekeeping apps, occupancy sensors or AI concierge systems shift skill demands, wage ladders and union strategies rather than eliminate roles outright.

Customer bias and opaque algorithms results in new equity risks. Online critiques often target visible staff while hiding upstream cost-cutting (a classic misdirection tactic); workers have little recourse and face discriminatory ratings. A new policy recommendation should be enhancing the transparency standards for guest ratings, anti-bias auditing, and local-government leverage (as Chapter 25 of The Handbook shows) to protect hospitality labour conditions.

Concluding remarks

The obvious strength of the volume is scope: we have in this Handbook thirty-two concise essays, each ending with further-reading lists, make the volume a literature-review goldmine. Its interdisciplinary approach also widens

geographical view by including South African, Australian and European cases (although it rests mainly in Anglophone centres). Yet breadth breeds unevenness: some chapters synthesise decades of debate, others offer narrower empirical slices; cross-referencing is light (and confined in the first and last chapter), leaving readers to connect dots between, say, financialisation (Part 2) and policy instruments (Part 10). For projects that need a sector-specific deep dive – platformised hotel work, for instance – researchers must supplement with targeted field studies.

Most chapters are state-of-the-field syntheses: they map debates, and point readers to further reading, rather than presenting large new datasets or original fieldwork. Some authors do illustrate points with brief case studies (e.g., the DoorDash #DeclineNow action, a UK daffodil farm, post-COVID remote worker moves), but these vignettes serve mainly as examples inside a broader approach. In other words, the Handbook's chief value is cartographic: it curates and organises the sprawling research on work futures - whereas deep, primary research is left to the sources it cites.

We can summarize here core take-away for a researcher interested in the field: The Handbook main attribute is the historical grounding – the first chapter shows that imagining the future of work always re-imagines the past and present, puncturing techno-determinist timelines. Automation is a new type of social relation since AI as "synthetic automation" is embedded in capitalist value extraction rather than a neutral productivity booster. Dedicated treatments of race, disability and queer temporalities situate technological change within differential power structures showing intersectional futures. We must observe the diversity of platforms as "non-labour" platforms (e.g., Booking.com, Yelp) that reshape conventional employment far beyond gig apps. One last important aspect is the granularity of sectors: separate chapters on services, advanced manufacturing and agrifood prevent a one-size-fits-all automation story.

In short, the Handbook offers a panoramic, critical map of where work may head and why. Its rich mix of history, feminist, critical race, anarchist, postcolonial, decolonial, Indigenous, Marxist, intersectional analysis and climate urgency provide a toolkit for anyone seeking to navigate - or contest - the changing world of work.

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