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Employment security in non-traditional careers: Exploring the dynamic of long-term work trajectories in thirteen European countries

Maxim Kovalenko and Dimitri Mortelmans

Abstract *In this article, we approach the debate on the so-called flexibility-security nexus from the long-term perspective of career studies, exploring empirical evidence on whether the increased labor market flexibility in the past decades has also led to more employment insecurity. We look at lifelong career sequence patterns in 13 European countries, with three objectives in mind. First, we examine to what degree empirical career patterns correspond to the career types postulated in theoretical career literature, namely the traditional and the ‘new’ career. Second, we look at whether these career patterns have changed in their relative prevalence over time. This analysis provides evidence for the discussion on whether career patterns in Europe have changed in the past decades. Third, we consider how employment security has evolved over time, depending on the career type. Our analyses indicate that there are slight changes in career structure in several European countries, and that some of the highly mobile career patterns are characterized by a higher degree of precariousness, a dynamic often overlooked in mainstream career studies. In terms of policy, our results suggest the need to combine labor market flexibilization with individual supportive measures for some workers.*

1 Introduction

The debate on whether the increasing flexibility of employment relationships in the past few decades implied a lower degree of labor security, is prominent in the contemporary labor literature (Muffels and Luijkx, 2008; Standing, 1999; Heery and Salmon, 2000; DiPrete et al., 2006; Kalleberg, 2009; Cappelli, 1999; Barbieri, 2009; Howell, 2004). The same debate is much less well developed in the

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field of career studies, which approaches the flexibility problematic from an explicitly long-term perspective and considers how individual working histories evolve over time (see e.g. [Arthur and Rousseau, 1996](#); [Baruch and Bozionelos, 2010](#); [Sullivan, 1999](#)). Despite several calls to pay more attention to the risks associated with the flexible career (e.g. [Van Buren, 2003](#)), the subject remains essentially understudied. Yet given the mainstream view of public policy makers in the Western countries that labor market flexibility is an essential tool for driving up economic competitiveness in the globalizing economy and for reducing unemployment, a proper understanding of these risks is crucial for all actors involved. Neglecting to account for the 'dark side' of flexibility may all too easily help install or strengthen the mechanisms of stratification on the labor market, and expose many workers to the risk of precarious work and poverty.

In this article, we empirically examine several assumptions that underpin mainstream theories on careers in flexibilizing labor markets, and look at the evolution of labor security over time for different career patterns in 13 European countries. These two interrelated issues form the backbone of our analysis.

In regard to the first issue, the central thesis of career theories dealing with the consequences of labor market flexibilization pertains to what can be termed 'the career transformation': the demise of the traditional career pattern with life-long employment in one or two organizations ([Sullivan, 1999](#)), and its replacement by the 'new' career, which is often characterized by higher external mobility ([Sullivan and Arthur, 2006](#)). Much research has been inspired by the assumption that such transformation took place, yet the empirical evidence on the extent of the change is far from being conclusive (e.g. see [Gunz et al., 2011](#); [Clarke, 2013](#)). The first possible reason for this is that insufficient attention has been paid so far to the national variation of how career patterns have evolved over time. A lot of research on the 'new' career originates in the Anglo-Saxon countries, where labor markets are much less regulated than in Continental Europe. At the same time, it has been convincingly demonstrated that national institutions can significantly impact labor market outcomes ([Muffels and Luijckx, 2008](#); [DiPrete et al., 2006](#)), which raises the question if the same claim about the career transformation can be applied to much more strictly regulated European labor markets, and to what degree. Second, the existing findings on the career transformation are predominantly based on short- or medium-term data, whereas research based on life-long data, so crucial for the understanding of careers in their totality, is very scarce.

Concerning the second issue that pertains to changes in labor security, it remains an open question as to what impact career flexibilization in Europe, whatever its extent, has had on the course of the individual career. Much of empirical research in the contemporary career literature has focused on factors that help workers navigate flexibilizing and uncertain employment environments, resting on the assumption that the risks associated with the increasing labor market flexibility can be tackled on the individual or organizational level, e.g. through investments in employability and self-directedness in career management. This approach implicitly leaves the insecurity-generating

factors on the macro level outside its field of vision, therefore potentially misrepresenting the total outcome of the flexibility-insecurity dynamic; and possibly suggesting a more positive view on career flexibilization than the reality would warrant (Guest et al., 2006).

In this article, we aim to contribute to a better understanding of career flexibilization and its consequences in Continental Europe. We start by describing the concerns related to the increasing labor insecurity that are voiced by some strands in economic and sociological literature on the subject of labor market transformations in the context of economic globalization and neoliberal marketization. Subsequently, we explore how these concerns connect with the prevailing theoretical insights within the contemporary career studies and provide empirical evidence that helps transpose the debate on the flexibility-insecurity controversy to the long-term career perspective. Our analyses shed empirical light on the dominant assumptions of the theories dealing with the allegedly 'new' career types, and provide insights into long-term changes that have occurred in careers of European workers in the past decades, pertaining both to shifts in career structure and to the dynamic of employment security. In addition, our analyses address a lacuna in research pertaining to the evolution of careers in Europe, given its characteristic regimes of labor market regulation.

2 Theoretical background

2.1 The debate on flexibility-security nexus

The last three decades of the twentieth century were marked by major transformations in the Western economies, spurred, among other factors, by an unprecedented rate of economic globalization, technological advances in transport and communication, the nascence of the Internet, increasing global competition and labor redistribution (Beck, 2000; Reich, 2008; Standing, 1999, 2009). These transformations went hand in hand with a Copernican shift in the dominant socio-economic paradigm, where the Keynesian model gave place to the neoliberal modes of economic thought and policy action (Harvey, 2011). Labor market deregulation took place in most Western countries, eroding to a large degree the traditional securities built during the Golden Era of full employment (Harvey, 2011; Standing, 1999). The 'new' economy, featuring higher levels of competition, market variety and technological complexity, required more flexibility from both organizations and the workers (Kalleberg, 2009). A result was the proliferation of various forms of flexibility, including increased job mobility, fixed-term contracts, subcontracting, freelance work, as well as other forms of 'atypical' working arrangements. There is an on-going debate in the sociological, economic and public policy literature about how the increasing flexibility in the labor markets has impacted workers (Muffels and Luijkx, 2008). Generally speaking, two perspectives can be discerned (see Tregaskis et al., 1998).

The first perspective, sometimes labeled as 'neo-Fordist' or even 'neo-Marxist', assumes a negative view on flexibilization. It emphasizes an increasing labor insecurity due a plethora of macro-level factors inherent to the 'new' economy and its mainstream neo-liberal policies. Labor markets have become much less regulated, driven to a larger extent by the pure market logic of supply and demand, whilst disembedding themselves from the social institutions designed to protect weaker labor market groups. Welfare provisions have been trimmed down substantially, and the responsibility for one's employment has been transferred onto the workers, the trend finding a reflection in the re-orientation of labor market policies towards activation and stricter controls (Harvey, 2011). The use of non-standard employment relationships, such as temporary work, fixed-term work and self-employment (of the real or the bogus kind) has increased in many countries (Standing, 2009; Tregaskis et al., 1998). Flexible working arrangements of these and other types allow companies to make quick adjustments to the business cycle and to changes and shocks on the volatile and competitive markets. At the same time, it is feared that such arrangements do not offer the same degree of social and economic security as the standard full-time employment (Van Buren, 2003). In addition, trade union power has been in decline as well in the past decades, and along with it the traditional means of reducing inequalities between employers and employees (Standing, 2009). Finally, the ability of capital to move quickly and the global nature of economy allows firms, especially multinationals, to traverse international borders to find the economic regime most favorable to business, which usually comes at the cost of lower labor protection.

All in all, this perspective posits that as a consequence of these changes, many workers in weaker positions on the labor market, such as lower educated workers or migrants, are now at higher risk of precarious employment, unemployment and poverty (Standing, 2011; DiPrete et al., 2006; Rodrigues and Guest, 2010). Some authors go even further, proposing that insecurity is inherent to advanced capitalist societies in general, without restriction to specific population strata (Beck, 2000).

The second perspective, sometimes labeled as 'post-Fordist', assumes a positive stance towards flexibility, focusing on the mechanisms that allow labor flexibility whilst maintaining labor security. In this view, the relationship between flexibility and security is not a trade-off, but rather that of mutual reinforcement (Muffels and Luijkx, 2008). According to this perspective, not an erosion of labor security takes place, but rather a shift towards new forms of security. Thus, management literature focuses on how individuals can adapt to uncertain employment conditions of the flexible economy, emphasizing the importance of continuous investment in skills as well as adaptability to the shifting demands of the labor market (e.g. Clarke and Patrickson, 2008; Van Buren, 2003). Proactive and 'self-directed' behavior on the labor market, self-knowledge and employability are key concepts in this 'new employment relationship' approach. On the macro-level, the 'flexicurity' paradigm, popular in the European policy circles (European Commission, 2007; Wilthagen and Tros, 2004), supports the positive view on the flexibility-security nexus. It focuses on the role of institutions in facilitating employability and activating workers towards labor market participation.

While the debate on the consequences of flexibility in the global economy is well-developed in relation to labor in general, this is hardly the case on the level of career studies. The dominant paradigms pertaining to the dynamic of careers in the 'new' economy are by and large aligned with the 'new employment relationship' approach, focusing on the individual capacities to cope with uncertain employment environments. They often ignore the discussion of the mechanisms on the global scale that systematically generate insecurity which may impact career trajectories in the long run (Inkson et al., 2012; Tregaskis et al., 1998). As consequence, these theories can be dangerously open to ideological interpretation (Roper et al., 2010).

2.2 Flexibilization and the new career

The process of globalization has also had important consequences for the structure of career opportunities and career enactment (Arnold and Cohen, 2008). Changes in the domain of work have spurred a new branch in career research and theory that came to focus on what is often described as 'the new career' (Arthur et al., 1999). Different aspects of the 'new career' have been captured in various theoretical frameworks, most popular being the 'boundaryless career' (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996) and the 'protean career' (Hall, 1996, 2004). Both frameworks postulate a transformation of how careers unfold in the context of flexibilizing labor markets. This transformation allegedly entailed a move away from the traditional organizational career within one or two organizations (Sullivan, 1999), and to a modern career type that is characterized by a higher degree of psychological and physical mobility (Sullivan and Arthur, 2006), as well as by a weaker dependence on a particular organization in terms of its development.

Several authors have noted that the discourse of the 'new' career is inherently positive, and dangerously aligned with the currently mainstream neo-liberal view on labor, which valorizes individualism, self-reliance and the ability to accept responsibility for own actions (Guest et al., 2006; Roper et al., 2010; Inkson et al., 2012; Zeitz et al., 2009). It paints modern workers as 'career capitalists' (Inkson and Arthur, 2001), that must assume control over their working lives and market themselves in an entrepreneurial fashion (Zeitz et al., 2009), leveraging their human and social capital to traverse organizational, cultural and occupational boundaries (Pringle and Mallon, 2003).

These commentators have raised concerns that the 'new' career discourse ignores the increasing insecurity and uncertainty that typifies the flexibilizing labor market (Tams and Arthur, 2010; Inkson et al., 2012; Zeitz et al., 2009). According to this view, the freedom of individual action can be severely constrained by contextual factors, which can result in a 'bifurcation in the labor market between those in a position to reap the benefits of the new, flexible career environment and those less able to gain a foothold' (Arnold and Cohen, 2008, p. 4).

Despite these calls to explore the 'dark side' of the modern career, empirical evidence is still scarce, especially for European countries, concerning how employment security has evolved in typical career patterns, given the vast changes in the economic order in the past several decades. This scarcity leaves the debate on the impact of labor market flexibilization on labor security, considered from the long-term career perspective, rather one-sided and predominantly geared towards its positive interpretation.

2.3 Hypotheses

In our analyses we focus on two separate, but closely interrelated sets of research questions. The first set pertains to the empirical validation of the assumptions that the 'new' career theory makes in postulating the shift from the 'traditional' to the 'new' career type, as described hereinabove.

These assumptions are largely accepted in the contemporary career literature, yet the empirical evidence that supports them is limited at best (Rodrigues and Guest, 2010; Clarke, 2013), especially in the European context (Kattenbach et al., 2014). More specifically, there exist substantial doubts as to whether external job mobility, a cornerstone element of the 'new' career, has effectively increased (Chudzikowski, 2012; Soens et al., 2005; Rodrigues and Guest, 2010; Kattenbach et al., 2014). Similar claims have been made in regard to career behavior and perceptions in general (Jacoby, 1999; Elchardus and Smits, 2014), implying that the traditional career is alive and well, certainly in the context of regulated European labor markets. In respect to the changes in career type prevalence, postulated by the 'new' career theories, we formulate the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1a: the theoretically postulated 'traditional' and 'new' career types can be identified empirically;

Hypothesis 1b: a shift has occurred in the prevalence of the two career types, with a relative decrease for the 'traditional' type in favor of the 'new' career type.

Detecting the empirical career patterns that correspond to the theoretical ideal types of the 'traditional' and the 'new' career, enables us to trace changes in career security over time in each career type. Different strands of theoretical literature offer opposing views in regard to changes in employment security in careers over time. It remains an open question, from the empirical perspective, whether there was a change, and in which direction. Moreover, it remains unclear to which degree the direction and the extent of changes in employment security depend on the career type. For example, it is possible that the core employees, who are more likely to have stable traditional careers, could have experiences different from those of the periphery workers, who are more likely to have more mobile careers (see Rodrigues and Guest, 2010). The following hypotheses can be formulated:

Hypothesis 2a: employment security in careers has decreased over time;

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Hypothesis 2b: changes in employment security in careers are contingent on the specific career types.

2.4 Defining and operationalizing employment security on career level

Employment security is one of the seven forms of labor security, along with (income security, labor market security, work security, job security, skills reproduction security and representation security (e.g. Standing, 2011)). Following Muffels and Luijkx (2008) and Wilthagen and Tros (2004), we define employment security as staying in employment, but not necessarily in the same job with the same employer. On the level of career, we consequently operationalize employment security as the percentage of career time that was spent in unemployment.

2.5 Control variables

In our analyses we control for gender and educational level, as both have been shown to be related to employment security (Azmat et al., 2006; Núñez and Livanos, 2010). In addition, we control for career duration to account for the heterogeneity in this respect.

In our analyses we will also consider how between-country differences in labor market mobility affect employment security. Mobility on the labor market is considered as one of the macro-level flexibility indicators (Muffels and Luijkx, 2008; Klau and Mittelstadt, 1986), and is often touted in European policy circles as an instrument for tackling labor market rigidity. It is therefore important to establish what effect does macro-level labor market mobility have on employment security, and how does it relate to individual-level career mobility.

3 Data and Methods

3.1 Data and Sample

To answer our research questions, we use data from SHARELIFE release 1.0, as of November 24, 2010, or SHARE release 2.5.0, as of May 24, 2011 (see Börsch-Supan, Hank, & Jürges (2005)). SHARELIFE data were collected in 2009 in 13 European countries, and contain a full retrospective record of working career mobility and its timing. Countries in the analysis are: Austria, Germany, Sweden, the Netherlands, Spain, Italy, France, Denmark, Greece, Switzerland, Belgium, the Czech

Republic, and Poland. The main selection criterion for the respondents was to be of age 50 or older at the first wave of the survey in 2004; partners or spouses of the initially chosen respondents were selected, when available, without considering age. Complete career records for the majority of the respondents are therefore available. The complete sample consisted of 18,841 respondents in all countries. Having excluded cases with missing values on one or several model variables, 16,673 respondents were retained in the analytical sample.

3.2 Methods

3.2.1 Optimal Matching Analysis

In respect to Hypothesis 1a, we establish typical career patterns in each country. When careers are conceptualized as sequences of work-related statuses, it becomes possible to derive a distance matrix between such sequences using Optimal Matching Analysis (Anyadike-Danes and McVicar, 2010). In our case, the principal statuses were *inactivity*, *unemployment*, *employment*, and *retirement*, with an additional splitting of *employment* into statuses pertaining to the sequential number of jobs in a career (e.g., 1st job, 2nd job etc). Fifty years counting from career start, were considered in the sequence analysis. The Levenstein I distance algorithm was used, with indel cost set to 1 and substitution cost set inversely proportional to frequencies at which respective transitions between statuses occurred (Lesnard, 2010).

The distance matrix was supplied as input to the Ward clustering algorithm, which yielded most typical career patterns based on the statuses mentioned above. Classifications were carried out for men and women in each country separately, to preserve gender-specific career types.

3.2.2 Kolmogorov–Smirnov test

In respect to Hypothesis 1b, we use the two-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, which allows to detect differences in two distributions. Using this method, we can observe whether the occurrence of the 'new' careers has increased over time, relative to its traditional counterpart. A separate test was carried out for each country.

3.2.3 Hierarchical modeling using MCMC

In respect to Hypotheses 2a and 2b, we use two-level hierarchical modeling of unemployment proportion in a career sequence, level one pertaining to individuals and level two to countries. Career

types obtained in the OMA analysis are entered into the model as predictors, along with a set of control variables, with the goal of comparing the evolution of employment security between the typical career types.

There is a technical caveat in this part of the analysis, related to the fact that the number of countries is relatively low ($N = 13$). This implies using maximum likelihood-based estimation is not feasible, due to likely distortions of the standard errors. At the same time, hierarchical modeling offers crucial analytical advantages, such as the estimation of individual variance, having controlled for variance between countries. This renders the method preferable to alternative approaches such as generalized estimating equations (GEE). The issue was resolved by using Bayesian estimation methods; namely, Markov Chain Monte Carlo (MCMC) estimation. Bayesian methods have gained substantial ground in the social sciences in recent decades, especially in hierarchical modeling due to the mathematical properties of the method (Lynch, 2007). Their efficiency is supported by simulation studies showing that the MCMC approach leads to more adequate model estimation in comparison with the traditional maximum likelihood-based algorithms in analytical situations with a low number of level-two units (Stegmueller, 2013).

In order to trace evolutions in employment security in career structure over time, we employ the following analytic strategy. Given our operationalization of employment security, career trajectories are treated as primary units of analysis. Therefore we do not trace changes *within* a career trajectory (as the sum of these changes already constitutes that trajectory), but we explore whether careers occurring later in time are characterized by higher or lower employment security. This achieved by taking the year in which a career has started (i.e. the respondent entered the labor market for the first time), as one of the predictors for employment security. Careers that have commenced at a later time, especially after 1960s, have been to a higher degree exposed to the pressures of economic globalization and labor market flexibilization, that have precipitated the career transformation postulated by the 'new' career literature. Any effect on the start year variable would therefore signify a potential change in career dynamics.

3.3 Measures

3.3.1 Dependent variable

Employment security in a career is measured as the number of years spent in unemployment divided by the total number of years in a career. This is expressed as a percentage and varies per definition from 0 to 100.

3.3.2 Predictors and control variables

Career type is a dichotomous variable comparing two career types: traditional and transitional. The variable will be defined based on the results of the Optimal Matching Analysis (OMA) of careers sequences; see the corresponding section below for details. Briefly, the traditional career type is characterized by a prolonged employment period with a single organization towards the end of a career, whether or not it is accompanied by one or several job-to-job transitions in the beginning of the career. The transitional career type is characterized by multiple job-to-job transitions throughout the entire career span.

Career start year is expressed as two last digits of the year in which a career has commenced. The variable was centered 60 (thus pertaining to the year 1960), the value approximating its mean. The distribution of the variable is presented in Figure 1.

Education is the number of years spent in full-time education in the initial educational trajectory. The variable was centered around its mean. *Labor market mobility* is a country-level predictor, expressed as an average number of jobs in a career for a given country. It reflects the general degree of mobility on the labor market. *Career length* is the number of years spent on the labor market. We introduce it as a control variable to correct for careers of unequal lengths. *Gender* is coded as 0 for men, 1 for women.

4 Results

4.1 Career typology

As the result of OMA, we have obtained seven main career types. Figure 2 presents the overall distribution of career statuses in time for each career type.

Two career types are present in all countries in the analysis except Greece, for men as well as for women: traditional career and transitional career. The *traditional* career (TD) is distinguished by having a prolonged period of employment within the same organization at the end of the career trajectory, regardless of whether it was preceded by one or several transitions in the beginning.

The *transitional* career (TS) is characterized by a high number of career transitions, generally remaining in employment. In contrast with the traditional career, career transitions continue after mid-career, whereas in the former type the worker came to be attached to a single organization. In terms of physical career mobility, this type is in line with the career trajectory postulated by the ‘new’ career theories.

Late mover (LM) and *inactive* (IN) career types are also present for both genders, but not in all countries. The late mover type resembles the traditional career in having low mobility and

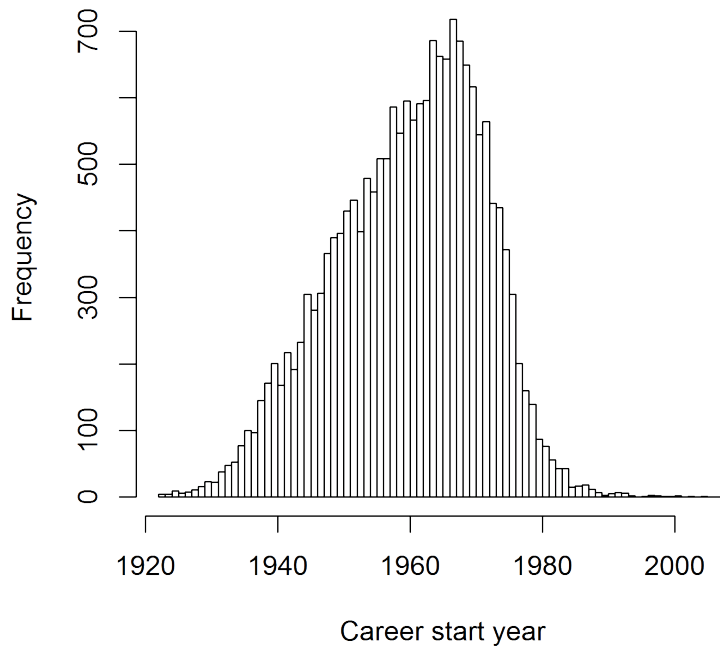


Fig. 1 Distribution of career start year in the study sample

prolonged attachment to the employing organization. The difference between the two is in the temporal placement of that attachment. For the late mover career, the period of attachment occurs in the beginning of the career, whereas for the traditional it is at the end. The inactive career type is marked by a relatively short period of employment, followed by labor market inactivity until retirement. This pattern is particularly characteristic for women, being present in all countries. For men, this career type is found only in Spain and Greece.

The remaining three career types are gender-specific. The *unemployed* career (UN) is characterized by prolonged periods of unemployment. It is typical for women only. In Belgium and the Netherlands the *intermittent* career (IT) type could be distinguished for men. Similar to the transitional career,

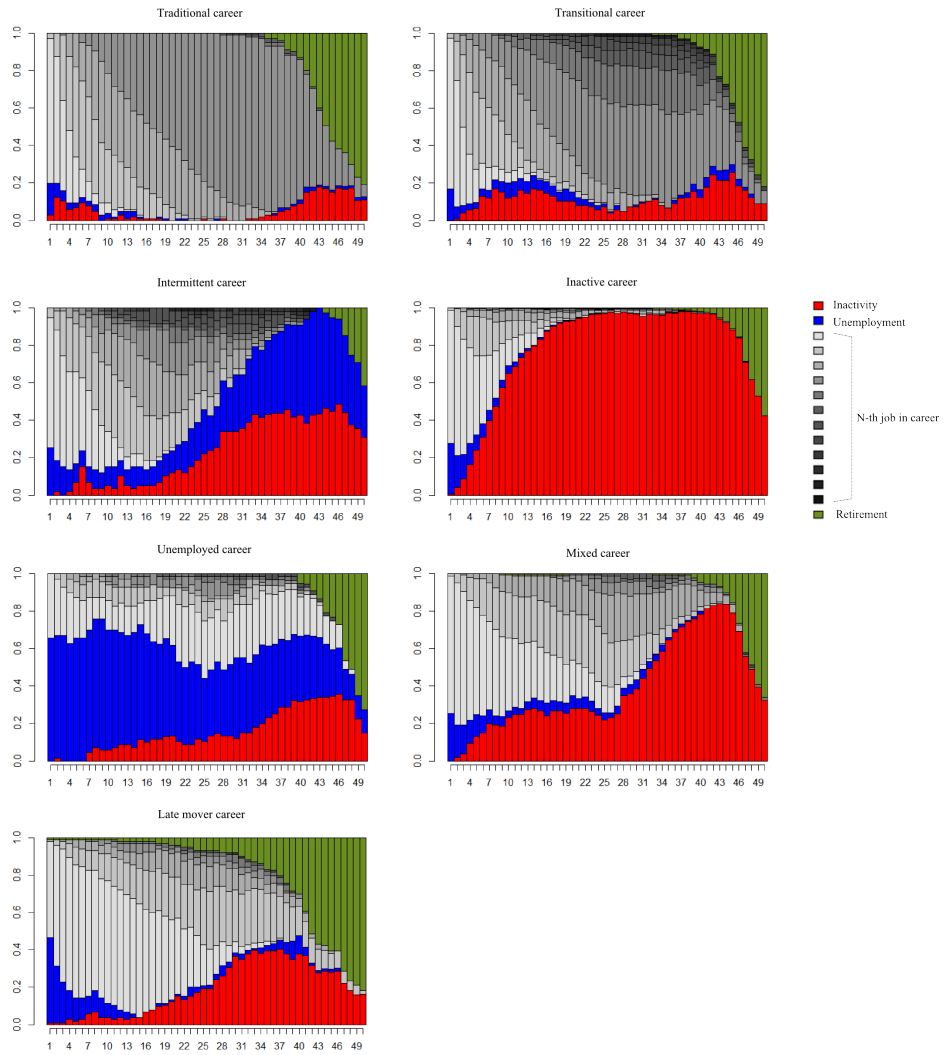


Fig. 2 Distribution of career statuses (y-axis) on career timeline (x-axis, years from career start). Source: Sharelife, own calculations.

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it is characterized by multiple career transitions throughout its entire course, yet the career is often interrupted by unemployment, especially in its second half.

The *mixed career* (MX) is typical for women in most countries. In this career type, periods of inactivity (roughly corresponding to the child rearing period in most cases) are combined with periods of employment. This type can be clearly distinguished from both the inactive and traditional types, being a combination of the two.

Table 1 presents the distribution of these careers types in the countries in the analysis.

Table 1 Career type distribution per country and gender (proportion and total)

<i>Career type</i>	TD	TS	LM	IN	MX	UN	IT	Total
Men								
Austria	0.88	0.05	0.07					332
Germany	0.75	0.19	0.06					854
Sweden	0.82	0.11	0.06					837
Netherlands	0.72	0.09	0.12				0.08	987
Spain	0.91	0.07		0.02				883
Italy	0.85	0.05	0.09					1113
France	0.80	0.10	0.10					1019
Denmark	0.74	0.26						940
Greece	0.86	0.03	0.10	0.02				1215
Switzerland	0.69	0.19	0.12					551
Belgium	0.90	0.05					0.05	1242
Czechia	0.72	0.14	0.14					784
Poland	0.72	0.12	0.16					817
Women								
Austria	0.47	0.15		0.35	0.03			438
Germany	0.53	0.13	0.11	0.23				941
Sweden	0.70	0.20		0.10				1013
Netherlands	0.39	0.08		0.41	0.11			1114
Spain	0.36	0.14		0.41	0.10			752
Italy	0.42	0.05		0.35	0.12	0.06		947
France	0.56	0.08		0.28	0.08			1233
Denmark	0.53	0.33		0.14				1137
Greece	0.73			0.13	0.14			928
Switzerland	0.48	0.23		0.29				697
Belgium	0.44	0.09		0.29	0.13	0.06		1334
Czechia	0.79	0.08	0.12	0.01				1061
Poland	0.56	0.09	0.07	0.23		0.05		951

These results support Hypothesis 1a. For tracing the evolution of employment security, we will retain only two types: traditional and transitional careers. These types correspond, in terms of mobility, to respectively the theoretical concepts of traditional and ‘new’ careers. Given how these two types are usually juxtaposed in theoretical literature, it is pertinent to contrast them in regard to employment security.

4.2 Shift in career type prevalence

Two-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test shows that the distribution of the traditional and the transitional patterns over time is different for the following six countries: Spain ($p < 0.001$), France ($p = 0.023$), Denmark ($p = 0.04$), Greece ($p = 0.012$), Czech Republic ($p < 0.001$), and Poland ($p < 0.001$). In all these countries except Greece the relative prevalence of the transitional pattern has increased (see Fig. 3), but not to the extent that would signify a replacement of the traditional type. For Greece, the shift has occurred in the opposite direction, the relative prevalence of the transitional pattern has increased over time. In other countries the test was insignificant, implying that no substantial shifts with respect to these types have occurred over time.

4.3 Evolution of employment security

The results for the hierarchical model of employment security evolution are presented in Table 2.

When interpreting the model, one needs to keep in mind that negative coefficients imply an improvement in employment security (decreasing the proportion of a career spent in unemployment), and vice versa. Most importantly, on the average, we observe an increase over time in employment security for the traditional career type, coupled with a decrease over time in employment security for the transitional career type. These findings support the Hypothesis 2b, and support Hypothesis 2a for the transitional career type, while rejecting it for the traditional type. The transitional type in itself is related to decreased employment security. Education, as expected, has a positive effect on employment security, whereas the female gender has a negative effect.

It is interesting to note that the contextual impact of the country-level mobility indicator, namely the average number of jobs in a career in a specific country, is positive in its main effect on employment security, but negative in its interaction with the transitional type. This implies that there is a differential contextual labor market effect for traditional and transitional careers. For both career types, being in a labor market with higher career mobility increases employment security, but more so for the traditional career type than for the transitional.

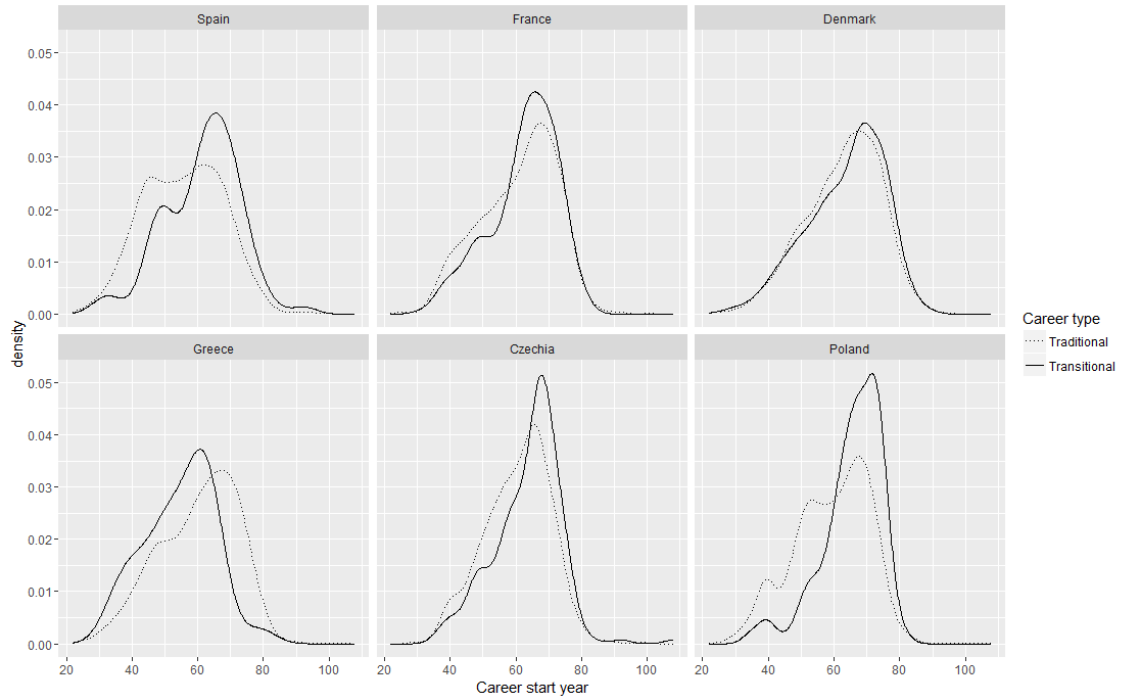


Fig. 3 Distribution of career start year density for countries with statistically significant differences between career types, based on two-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test.

An interesting observation can be made in regard to the differences between countries and individuals in how employment security has evolved in the two career types. Figure 4 shows predicted regression lines of how employment security changed for the traditional and the transitional career types. For the traditional career type, the estimations show a decrease of the career proportion spent in unemployment (i.e. increase in employment security) in all countries. For the transitional career the evolution has been more heterogeneous, some of the countries showing a positive trend, while the others—a negative one.

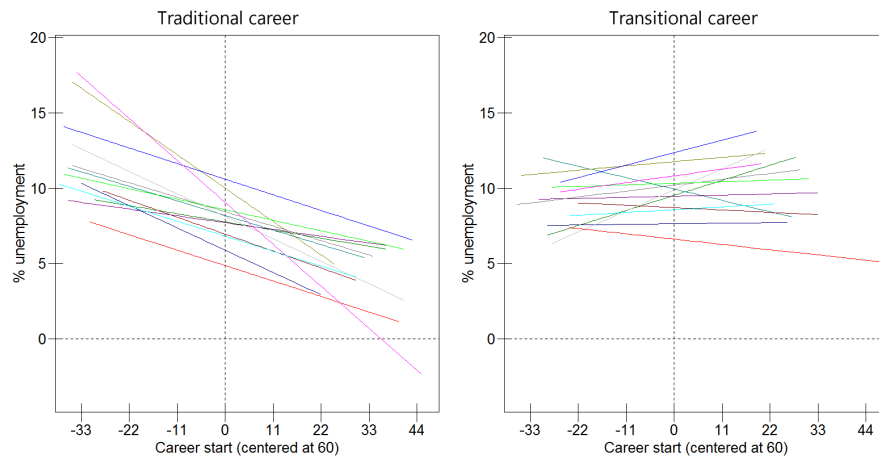
The contrast in the dynamic of employment security between the traditional and the transitional career remains even after the differences between the countries have been accounted for. Figure 5 shows the individual variance of employment security, plotted against career start time. The lower curve pertains to observations with the traditional career pattern, while the upper curve refers to observations with the transitional pattern. Both curves show an increase of variance, meaning that the internal differences within each career type have grown. Yet for the transitional career that

Table 2 Multilevel model of employment security

<i>Fixed effects</i>	<i>Coef (SD)</i>	<i>95% CI</i>		<i>ESS</i>
Constant	3.602***(0.523)	2.557	4.638	25000
Education	-0.146***(0.015)	-0.177	-0.116	23481
Transitional	1.482***(0.219)	1.053	1.912	25000
Gender	1.016***(0.122)	0.779	1.254	24418
Career start	-0.109***(0.024)	-0.157	-0.062	25000
Career start * Transitional	0.135**(0.044)	0.051	0.224	20581
Average jobs	-1.605**(0.610)	-2.817	-0.392	25000
Average jobs * Transitional	0.775**(0.240)	0.300	1.251	24378
Career length	-0.144***(0.021)	-0.184	-0.103	25000
Observations	16,673			
DIC	115589.102			

Note:

*p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

**Fig. 4** Country-level evolution of employment security over time

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increase in variance is much more pronounced, hinting at a polarization in regard to employment security within that type.

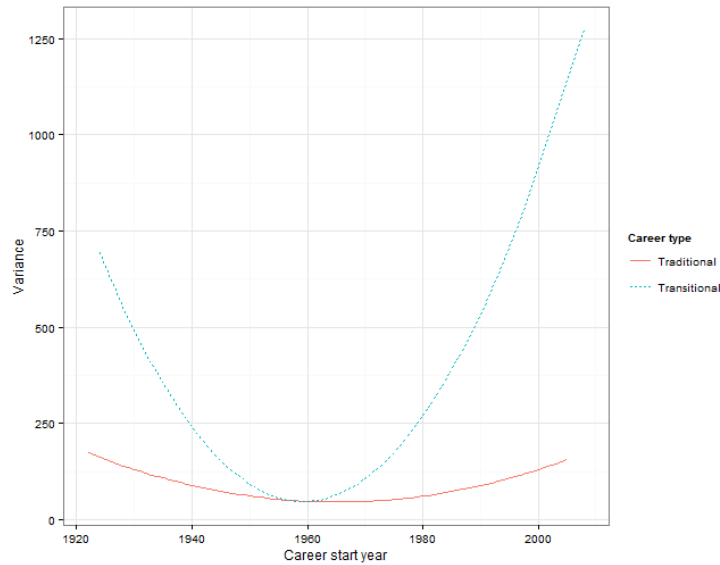


Fig. 5 Individual-level variance of employment security over time

5 Discussion and conclusion

In this article, we have primarily focused on the evolution of security in careers over time. The issue of labor security has been widely discussed in literature on labor, where two main and opposing views can be discerned (Tregaskis et al., 1998). Both views trace global changes in economy, technology and society, changes that may be summarily labeled as economic globalization or the 'new' economy, with its intensification of international trade, competition between individuals, firms and even countries, free flow of capital, labor market flexibilization and many technological advancements. The two views diverge, however, on the account of the implications that these changes have had on the labor security of individual workers (Reich, 2008). Our analysis contributes to the understanding of the

career dynamic that has accompanied the shift towards the 'new' economy in Europe, and to the evolution of employment security on the career level, from an explicitly long-term perspective.

We have started by looking at the basic assumptions of the mainstream career theories that pertain to the career transformations in the context of the 'new' economy. Our results go against the thesis of a major career transformation, which has been brought forward by these theories. Instead, we can observe minor relative changes in the prevalence of the traditional and the 'new' careers in some European countries, while the traditional type still remains dominant. An apparent question is, can we extrapolate this conclusion to the careers that are unfolding today? Is it perhaps the nature of our sample, largely comprised of completed careers, that masks the potential intensification of the shift towards the 'new' career in the third millennium? In the light of these questions, our results are best considered along with other recent research on the subject, based on shorter-term data. [Kattenbach et al. \(2014\)](#) arrives at conclusions that are similar to ours, finding that the 'new' career concepts, developed primarily in the Anglo-Saxon context, likely do not describe what is happening on German labor markets. Our results nuance this statement, in that there effectively exist career patterns that correspond to the 'new' career in terms of mobility, and, according to earlier research ([Kovalenko and Mortelmans, 2014](#)), are not necessarily characterized by poor career outcomes typical for precarious careers. This would imply that changes described by the 'new' career theories may be found in certain niches of the labor market. Our results are in line with the second statement of [Kattenbach et al. \(2014\)](#), namely that the career transformation can be perceived only to a certain extent. [Elchardus and Smits \(2014\)](#) echoes these findings, the focus being on young adults (18-36). The authors find that stable upwards trajectory is still the most popular career form, whereas the attraction for the flexible career wanes rapidly with age, a process that goes hand in hand with choosing to combine work and family. While 38% of respondents aged between 18 and 20 opted for the ambitious flexible career, only 20% had the same preference in the age group between 31 and 36. These results indicate, that the flexible career type is relatively unpopular not only in terms of objective prevalence, but also in terms of subjective preferences of young workers. [Soens et al. \(2005\)](#) also find that while there are minor shifts towards the transitional career pattern, the traditional career still holds its place firmly in Belgium. [Heery and Salmon \(2000\)](#) describe a similar dynamic for the UK, stating that aggregate job tenure declined only modestly in the UK, although for some groups more pronouncedly (cf. supra). [Rodrigues and Guest \(2010\)](#) report similar findings for several countries.

Our results demonstrate that there is a lot of variation between countries in terms of career type composition. For example, Denmark showed only a minor shift in relative prevalence of the transitional career, yet the country was already characterized by a higher share of the transitional career type (see [Table 1](#)). At the same time, other countries, such as Belgium, had a lower share of careers of the transitional type, without statistically significant changes over time. An important conclusion that becomes apparent from these results is that the processes of career flexibilization are

very diversified, can occur in different directions, as the example of Greece attests, and are highly dependent on the national context. The study of contemporary careers should take this into account, and explore the national variations, not abandoning the main thesis of the career transformation, but nuancing it. In other words, the career transformation may be seen as a spectrum that is embedded in a complex mosaic of the local socio-economic processes, rather than as a single form.

The main thrust of our analysis, pertaining to the decrease of employment security in careers in the aftermath of the economic globalization, has yielded several results. First, we've established that also in this regard the exact dynamic is contingent on the national context. Second, we've found no insecurity increase in the traditional careers, coupled with some increase thereof in some, but not all countries, for the transitional career type. This may suggest that while there has been some decrease in employment security, the process has been limited to some labor market strata, without becoming universal. Our results suggest that this process may have occurred in some transitional careers, as they indicated a possible polarization process within this type. This would imply that while some transitional careers remained stable or even improved in terms of employment security, in line with the positive interpretation of flexibilization, and possibly conform to the ideal type of the 'new' career, other have become more precarious, in line with the neo-Fordist view.

Several authors have, in fact, formulated the idea of labor market polarization as a consequence of flexibilization, (Clarke, 2008; Kim, 2013; Standing, 2011; Van Buren, 2003; Zeitz et al., 2009). It has been hypothesized that highly skilled and employable workers may benefit from operating in flexible labor markets, as it allows avoiding organizational bureaucracy, and enables them to utilize external job mobility to boost their careers. At the same time, those in weaker labor market strata, such as lower educated workers, or those without easily marketable skills, are the losers of the flexibilization, as it pushes them into poorly paid jobs without long-term security, easily discardable. Empirical evidence is acutely lacking in this respect, and while our results make a contribution, the polarization hypothesis remains a fruitful area for further research.

6 Limitations and directions for future research

As any empirical research, our is not without its limitations. First, the analysis of the reasons behind the between-country variations in both career type prevalence and changes in employment security over time was left outside the scope of this article. While we stressed observing the heterogeneity in the evolution of career dynamic over time, it would be interesting to examine the specifics of its interaction with the national context, related, for example, to the differences in labor market regulation, historical tendencies and so forth. Second, in constructing our career typology we focused on physical career mobility alone. At the same time, it can be argued, that changes in careers have occurred not only in terms of physical, but also in terms of psychological mobility (Sullivan and

Arthur, 2006). Bringing the subjective dimension into account may bring additional details into the spotlight, e.g. pertaining to the perception of insecurity, along with the stress and health effects associated with it.

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