

BOOK REVIEW

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Jacek Gądecki, Marcin Jewdokimow and Magdalena Żadkowska, *I work here! A sociological study of work carried out at home on the basis of telework (Tu się pracuje! Socjologiczne studium pracy zawodowej prowadzonej w domu na zasadach telepracy)*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo LIBRON – Filip Lohner 2017, pp. 212.

The book by Jacek Gądecki, Marcin Jewdokimow and Magdalena Żadkowska entitled “I work here! A sociological study of work carried out at home on the basis of telework” (Gądecki Jacek, Marcin Jewdokimow, Magdalena Żadkowska. 2017. *Tu się pracuje! Socjologiczne studium pracy zawodowej prowadzonej w domu na zasadach telepracy*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo LIBRON – Filip Lohner, ss. 212), is a presentation of the research results of the project „So you are staying at home? An ethnographic study of paid homework on the principles of telework”. The research project has been carried out since August 2014, funded by the National Science Center (DEC-2013/09/D/HS6/00437).

The book consists of an introduction, five chapters, a summary chapter as well as “tactical recommendations” and appendixes.

In the introduction to the book, the Authors explain the reasons for their interest in the topic of telework, discuss their research goals and also indicate the need for practical implications. They draw attention to the fact that they used analytical autoethnography which accompanied them throughout the whole research process. The main objectives of the research work concerned the analysis of the experiences of teleworkers themselves who decided to perform this kind of work. The Authors define teleworkers as “those who work away from their employer or client, using a computer and the internet for communication purposes” [Gądecki, Jewdokimow, Żadkowska 2017: 50].

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The research presented in the book was based on a variety of data sources and lasted for 36 months. The intention of the project was to check the impact of teleworking on the private and professional lives of teleworkers. The research was conducted among couples who lived in a common space, in order to explore how they organise, change and negotiate the place they lived in. The project participants were people who had to meet three criteria: using the home as their main workplace; using information and communication technologies (ICT) at their work; working on such principles for a long period of time and with teleworking taking most of their week. In the study, 10 men and 24 women took part. The form of employment was not taken into account as a clear criterion.

The authors point out that in the context of telework, the term flexibility should be replaced by the concept of limpness (*wiotkość*), which concerns the perception of problems and the impossibility of implementing teleworkers' work and everyday life activities. Limpness refers specifically to the need to adapt to the conditions that are given to us. The authors also indicate that time management should be replaced with the term orchestration (*orkiestracja*) [Gądecki, Jewdokimow, Żadkowska 2017: 13], which means coordinating time, space and roles at home in connection with the work being done.

In the first chapter, the Authors present the theoretical background of their research. They analyse the concept of work-life balance (WLB) as a possibility of reconciling work and personal life. At the same time, the Authors stress that it may be illusory to assume that work at home allows for a convenient combination of work and private life.

The authors refer to the landscape of work and the limpness of the boundaries of work. As theoretical assumptions, they adopted the "theories of the border between private and professional life" and, above all, the so-called border work, which concerns the placement of work and private life, as well as transcendence, which concerns the possibility of passing between different points while maintaining the boundaries in the same place. The authors present a toolbox that organises categories of space, time and social roles.

The second chapter, entitled "Our toolbox", contains information on the tools used during the research process and about the path the Authors went through to set the most essential ones and adapt them to the concepts chosen. An additional element is the validity of using the specific tools for the couples' research.

Meetings with the respondents during the project took place three times with long intervals in between. In the project, interviews with teleworkers were

used, and the respondents were also asked to keep a working time journal and autophotoethnography. The second and third phases of the study were interviews with the teleworkers' partners and interviews in pairs, respectively.

Particularly noteworthy is the use of many research techniques in the project, especially the dyadic interview, which was used in the final stage of the study. They emphasise the importance of the dyadic interview as a method that enriches the other techniques used in this study. It was crucial for the researchers to emphasise the use of in-depth-interviews (IDI) and that for the time of the interview, the researcher himself or herself becomes close to the subject.

The third chapter concerns the home space – negotiating the boundaries between work and home, inside the home. The authors present the way in which the interviewees mark the work space.

The authors analyse the home as a special category – its understanding, spatial layout, and the functions it should perform. This is a necessary element of the study, because one of the research objectives was to determine how the participants define and shape the work space. The home, in the conclusions of the research, appears to be a divided space; it is a space where naming individual fragments in order to establish the boundaries of domestic and professional life is required. Previously, the home seemed to be a space divided into specific functional spaces, but still subordinated to home life. Teleworker needs a space dedicated to themselves, a space they can call their own for the duration of the time they are working. It is easier to establish spatial boundaries when there is a place such as an office, or a room which can be easily closed, separating themselves from the household buzz.

One of the most popular places where work was performed was the bedroom. However, as the project progressed, they considered this space to be inappropriate for teleworking because the boundaries between work and relaxation were blurred. Over the course of the project, the participants gave up the bedroom as a work space.

An additional element in determining the spatial boundaries of working at home is technology. Electronic devices used for the tasks of a teleworker were crucial in defining the space. These include computers, tablets and smartphones. Their location defined the place as a workplace; where the device was located, that was the current workplace.

The analysis of the home space in the context of telework is the thread affecting the contemporary understanding of the home and its functional space, especially in the context of the flexible labour market. The authors themselves emphasise that this also has a practical meaning for potential telework employees,

but also for all those who occupy themselves with home space and its arrangement. Practical tips are important for all of these people so that telework can make a real contribution to reconciling work and family life.

In the fourth chapter, the Authors analyse the meaning of time and the different ways it relates to life and work processes. First of all, they define the process of orchestration. They draw attention to the role that technology plays in helping to construct time schedules and free time. Secondly, the importance of the individualisation and privatisation of time is underlined as part of post-modern society, as are the results, such as having free time as well as time for oneself. For the teleworker's family, it is important to coordinate activities related to the use of a given time for matters related to household duties, professional work, and sometimes for family, friends and time for themselves. The interviewees expressed opinions about the illusory nature of time which a teleworker can make use of. Incompetent management and not setting boundaries can consequently lead to constant tension, frustration and time pressure.

The fifth chapter describes, among others, the macro and micro transitions between roles. The macro transitions consist of changing job, changing the nature of the work and various life changes. Transitions on the micro scale are transitions connected with commuting, for example. In addition, the authors indicate a problem related to the need for the teleworkers to construct mental boundaries. It is difficult to maintain these mental boundaries between free time and work time, so the project participants, in order to settle the boundaries, use routines, rituals and signals that are significant for the implementation of individual roles. They also point out that telework and changes in the labour market have introduced changes in the appearance and character of homes and apartments.

The last chapter, entitled "Towards a critical design anthropology", is a summary of the whole book. The authors present here their reflections on the entire research process and the conclusions they reached in the analysis of the research results.

The last part of the book contains the Tactical Recommendations and appendixes, which include interview scenarios and situation scenarios. The Tactical Recommendations are 10 commandments for a reflective teleworker which contain advice on effective telework – the implementation of social roles, the division of the home space, and the negotiation of partner schedules. The suggestions presented are the result of the analysis of the findings obtained in the study and are intended to help future teleworkers in making conscious decisions about the choice of telework as their own form of work.

According to Ślązak [2012: 225] “The most frequently discussed topics by employees are the ability and adaptability of combining work at home with family life, productivity and the productivity of telework, comparing teleworkers’ satisfaction with regular workers’, communication problems, and the attitude of remote employees to this form of performing professional duties”. The existing Polish literature on the subject also tackles the predispositions of teleworkers, which include their abilities to organize work and self-discipline themselves. It is emphasised that the home is part of the teleworking office, therefore it is essential to establish boundaries between work and household duties. The literature also points out that teleworking, especially for women, makes it possible to reconcile professional and family responsibilities. However, regarding efficiency, Nilles [2003] suggests that working at home with a small child can be more difficult than it might seem since a teleworker needs to take care of a small child to be able to perform his or her duties. Telework is also a good solution for people with disabilities [Wiśniewski 2007].

The book also covers the topics discussed in the literature. However, the research supplements the existing knowledge with a detailed analysis of teleworkers’ relationships with their partners and the organisation of domestic and professional life. In the course of the dyad analysis, the authors show changes in the scope of social roles, the organisation of their home space and the negotiations between partners.

Performing work on a different basis than a full-time job at the employer’s headquarters requires employees to transform their physical, social and mental space. Telework is treated as an opportunity to reconcile work and family life. The idea of work-life balance promoted nowadays assumes the possibility of matching the implementation of various social roles. Using the terms “orchestration” and “limpness” as part of the theoretical background proved to be beneficial. They help to describe the unpredictability of mechanisms on the flexible labour market, and at the same time they help to realise the implementation of social roles in an individualised society, where despite the self-discipline developed, the individual is even more dependent not only on other people but also on technology. At the same time, the question appears: to what extent does performing telework make a teleworker a technology-dependent person even though this very person wanted to be more independent working on the flexible labour market?

It is worth emphasising that in the post-modern era, time has become a value that is “possessed”, “used”, or “gained”. Modern society was characterised by a standard social work pattern typical of society, within which life phases deter-

mined specific activities in time [Hajduk 2001], and where time was an instrument and not a widely desired good.

In their research, the authors reveal the dependence of the project participants on self-management and the huge psychological pressure they face, which may have been less visible in a modern society in which social biographies were not as individualised as today. The pressure on time self-management combined with the lack of models and strategies of individual work and life organisation paints an attractive picture of flexible work as a utopia rather than a realistic plan for a professional life in which various social roles are combined.

It is equally important that the Authors explore the various social roles of female teleworkers. Here, the interviewees have to face the traditional understanding of working at home as unpaid work for the benefit of the family and household. On the one hand, the respondents emphasise that this is a form of personal fulfilment. On the other hand, it seems that being physically at home, women more often feel the need to simultaneously carry out the roles related to running a home. Undoubtedly, a telework employee is required to coordinate different roles, which the Authors mention, describing orchestration as a principal element of common home life. However, teleworkers seem to have a sense of duty towards the home, resulting from a stereotypical, internalised view of working at home.

An excellent strategy in the book was to include tactical recommendations, which were placed at the end of each chapter, and which contained additional information found on websites describing telework and the conditions for its implementation.

It seems that the authors treat the home as an important element in organising the post-modern labour market. The authors mention the meaning of home in modern society as a separate space where it was mainly housework that was provided. From this point of view, they draw attention to the home as a place connected with domestic duties. The aim is to lead the reader to the conclusion about changes of home space functions in post-modern society. Nowadays, the home is an area where domestic, as well as professional work, can be provided. Moreover, the authors focus on the differences in defining the home as a place to live and/or work between modern and post-modern society.

In the context of the entire research process and the results of the analyses presented in the book, it seems, however, that the nature of teleworkers' work has not been fully discussed and some questions remain open. For instance, the authors did not extensively discuss the issue of the relationship between specific

time management skills and the requirements of specific professions. Moreover, is telework recommended only for, e.g., managers? What types of professional roles can be performed effectively through teleworking? Is there a general relationship between a given activity and telework? The authors emphasised that their main goal was to analyse the perception of social roles, time and space in connection with telework. However, a general description, assumptions, and preliminary theses that could be an inspiration for further research on the conditions of telework could also have been included in the general practical recommendations.

There is also the need to explore the types of teleworker contracts in order to review the rules of work agreed upon with an employer and applied to clients. The authors cite one case when a participant, guided by his own experiences and difficulties in contacting clients, established the rules of such work together with his team. On the other hand, there is insufficient information in the book as to whether such requirements were set by the employers themselves. Expanding this thread in the future is important, for example, to make employees aware not only of the positive aspects of telework, but also that this type of work, in addition to requiring temporary self-discipline (which the authors pay attention to), requires a separate space, especially when dealing with clients via video.

In sum, the book presents practical material to be used in the everyday practice of human resources management and time self-management. It also points out the transformation of social roles and negotiations between partners in the teleworkers' families. Undoubtedly, an advantage of the book is its role in the accurate demonstration of telework, devoid of the almost mythical ideals which, in the new economy, are especially cherished and propagated. The research conducted as part of the project opens new perspectives for further investigation into the implementation of the principles of telework.

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