

Parental Labour - Labour Market Acceptance Driven by Civil Activism

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Abstract: There are global demographic tensions generated by ageing and increasingly shrinking population in developed economies, and rapid population growth (especially young cohorts) in developing countries. These challenges require social support for parents and parenting, however increasingly robust and sophisticated austerity policies roll back existing social services and decompose even the very idea of the welfare state. Social activism, including feminist and gender movements, calls for institutional shifts. Changes must affect statistics by facilitating to (re-)incorporate into economy and Economics parental labour - together with household activities and other traditionally neglected forms of (often primarily social) value creation.

Our study, which explores parental labour in the context of the transformational effects of civil society, indicates that: 1) in developed countries it is characterized by similar, often contradictory effects and trends - as any other work. Parents have to mobilize increasingly sophisticated - and expensive - skilled work, involve more and more experts in order to ensure their children's sound physical, intellectual, moral, artistic development. These trends - together with the stagnation of labour income, population aging and decline - drive growing participation of women in market-framed, salaried value creation. 2) Empirical data collected through surveys and case studies enabled us to identify institutional changes which characterize responding students and young adults, as well as volunteers participating in multi-coloured activities carried out by diverse civil society organizations. 3) Younger generations perceive parenting as labour, an important mechanism of value creation. It interplays with growing awareness of the significance of gender issues and the importance of overcoming and preventing the further growth of inequality in the context of digitalization.

We conclude that the analysis of parental labour, which has a profoundly and deeply multi-disciplinary character, requires a process approach and methodological pluralism. Our research indicates growing socio-economic acceptance of parental labour that capitalizes on civil activism feed backing with institutional changes constitutive and generative of the civil society's transformational dynamism. This interplays with the self-empowering civil society's capacity of agency, its capability to contribute to the emergence of a cooperative, sharing, and genuinely sustainable knowledge driven-society.

Keywords: parental labour, civil activism, institutional changes, alternative patterns of value creation.

1. Introduction

There is increasing social acceptance of the view that raising children is hard work. Civil activism can facilitate social recognition of parental labour by contributing to and amplifying its acceptance even by the labour market. Such acceptance can interplay with global demographic imbalances generating feed backing tensions and multi-dimensional change tendencies (OECD, 2012; WB, 2015; UN, 2017). While on the global North the population decreases and ages in the countries of former third and fourth world a rapid population growth takes place with primary increase of young cohorts. This imbalance interplays with the effects of accelerating climate change, also triggering mass-migration (as expected in the Sahel zone) especially in areas of (local and regional) conflicts (as in Syria).

In developed and transitional economies the demographic decline is also connected with the dominance of austerity, which enforces marketization and monetization of welfare services and questions the necessity and utility of the very welfare state by promoting its systematic decomposition. These tendencies also interplay with growing work intensity as well as with increasing participation in tertiary education. Feedback between these mutually catalytic phenomena brings about delayed readiness to get married and have children. Together, this creates an important driver of long-term demographic decline, which is currently becoming more and more visible and generating multi-dimensional changes in Europe, Russia and also Asian countries, including China and Japan.

The demography-related changes in many developed and transitional countries interact with technological changes, mostly related to digitalization, creating tensions on the labour market. These challenges are connected with the systematic 'descaling' of welfare services, making child-rearing a growingly difficult task. The emerging mass awareness of such contradictory trends is connected with increasing civil activism. Such activism can contribute to institutional shifts feed backing with growing social acceptance that parenting is a complex work - as the analysis of empirical data shows (Bagirova and Shubat, 2017).

The recognition of parental labour (as well as household work) as an important aspect of value creation can capitalize on civil activism feed backing with association-prone institutional changes characterizing the civil society's transformational dynamism (Veress, 2016; 2017). The authors argue that similar shifts can promote increased, though as yet often tacit, acceptance by labour markets that the parental work of human reproduction is a major source of high value and the production of GDP. Civil activism also plays a significant role in shaping typical patterns of technology enactment (Orlikowski, 1992; 2000) and the social division of labour. Both can follow the logic of capital accumulation, catalysing increasingly destructive externalities as well as of social capital accumulation focusing on quality of life and of growth facilitating exit the Anthropocene (Heikkurinen et al, 2017). Civil activism promotes (and capitalizes on) association-prone institutional and relational dynamics. It brings about and enhances new, inclusive and un-fragmented - often large scale patterns of - cooperation feed backing with participative competition providing altered dialectics. The civil activism can facilitate cooperative dynamism in digitalization serving as driver of mutual approximation among the societal macro-sectors by enabling cooperative and sharing patterns of the emerging knowledge-driven society (Veress, 2016).

Parenting is characterized by controversial trends, similar to any other types of labour. It is a domain where marketization and monetization has a growing role. In order to ensure their children's sound physical, intellectual, moral, artistic development, parents are subject to growing pressures to incorporate an increasing volume of paid services, mobilize more and more experts to provide increasingly sophisticated and expensive skilled work (Bagirova and Shubat, 2017). Conversely, civil activism can enable following altered patterns of human reproduction through enforcing declining standards of work time to be spent on (rapidly intensified) wage work, frequently causing physical and psychological damage and burnout. Civil activism can play a significant role either in preventing the further decline of the volume and quality of state-funded education, healthcare and social services, and overcoming pressures generated by these tendencies. Such activism can also promote non-traditional patterns similar to basic income, which can decrease pressures that force the participation of women in often lower-paid salaried work. Civil activism can capitalize on and facilitate the deployment of various requirements that feminist and gender theories and movements argue for (Tong, 2006; Treas and Drobnic, 2010; Federici, 2012).

Volunteer activism is intertwined with association-prone institutional changes, the dual primacy of a non-zero-sum approach and growing recognition of the interdependence characteristic for civil society. This shift allows overcoming the institutional twin-dominance of zero-sum-paradigm and resource scarcity view, which dominates the market and public sectors. This institutional change helps to (i) alter relational dynamism, (ii) improve the effectiveness of resourcing and extending the collective resource base, (iii) unleash inbuilt creativity, and (iv) provide transformational capacity, characterising cooperative dynamism (Veress, 2016). This approach enables analysing (feedbacks among) phenomena possessing fundamentally and deeply multi-disciplinary character such as parental labour and the transformational dynamism of the civil society organizations.

Consequently, the current paper aims to discuss parental labour, its potential recognition by (players of the) labour market in the context of civil activism (i) enforcing multi-dimensional changes in order to prevent and overcome externalities driving exponential speed of the appearance of Anthropocene and (ii) facilitating association-prone dynamics constitutive and generative of cooperative, sharing, and genuinely sustainable knowledge-driven societies. The paper capitalizes on two studies. One analyses parenting as work by surveying the perception of students and young parents (Bagirova and Shubat, 2017). The other explores sources and transformational effects of civil society dynamism by deploying process ontology and methodological pluralism (Veress, 2016). The study assumes that these phenomena are interconnected making worth, and both possess fundamentally and deeply multidisciplinary character making possible to link also their exploration.

2. Data and Methods

For our research into parental labour, we carried out a series of empirical studies in Russia (we note that we consider Russia's fertility-related demographic problems to be typical for many European countries):

1. A sample survey of students from Urals Federal University, located in one of the biggest cities in Russia, Ekaterinburg. We used stratified sampling, with an error rate of less than 3% and a sample size of 400 people;
2. Qualitative studies:
 - Content analysis of essays written by Masters students from Urals Federal University (Ekaterinburg, Russia). In these essays respondents who do not have children (who we see as potential future parents) were asked to share their thoughts on two topics: 1) the family in which they grew up (did their parents struggle with raising them, did they have enough knowledge for this); 2) the family in which they will be parents themselves

(they were asked the following sorts of questions: What do they associate parenting with? Is it hard to be a parent today? Does parenting require special knowledge and do you have it?)

- In-depth interview with “current” parents, who are raising children. In these interviews we tried to ascertain whether the parents themselves consider looking after, raising and developing children to be work.

3. Statistical analysis of indicators of the extra-curricular education system in Russia. In Russia this type of education is governed by the federal law “On education” and is aimed at “comprehensively satisfying a person’s educational needs for intellectual, moral, physical and/or professional improvement and does not entail an increase in the level of education” (*Federal law “On education” 2012. p.75.1*). We view the system of extra-curricular education as the opportunity for parents to “delegate” parental labour functions by bringing in experts with professional competencies to develop certain skills and knowledge in their children. Using official Russian statistics, we analysed the dynamics of a number of indicators of the extra-curricular education system, related to the number of these organisations, the number of specialists involved, the number of children studying and so on.

3. Results

Findings from this research can be summarized as follows:

1. An analysis of the views of young people as regards their acceptance of parenting as work revealed polarized opinions.

Thus the overwhelming majority of students, potential future parents, consider parenting to be work. When asked, “do you consider parenting to be work?”, 9 out of 10 respondents answered affirmatively. Only one-tenth of those we spoke to disagreed with this statement. Some of the arguments surfaced for polar opinions was stated by parents raising children. Here are some excerpts:

Woman, 34 years old: *“Of course this is work! Work to create and raise a new generation.”*

Man, 46 years old: *“No, I do not consider parenting to be work. It may be hard, but when you look at it in time, you realise that this was the ultimate joy, the best days of your life.”*

Man, 31 years old: *“No. Work is something done for the good of society, we have children for ourselves, not society. By the same token you could call sex work.”*

In describing the substance of parental labour, mothers stress its stressful and monotonous, yet creative nature, the emotional intensity of this type of activity:

Woman, 43 years old: *“Well, in substance... even just feeding a child, cleaning up after him, taking him for a walk. This is very physical. And it takes time.”*

Woman, 34 years old: *“This is both routine and creativity. Routine in day-to-day matters, which turns into creativity when you do everything together with your child, helping him to learn about the world. This is physical work in the first few years, when you’re physically carrying him around. Emotional, too - raising, supporting, soothing and teaching him to accept himself and the world. This is more emotional creativity.”*

2. Our analysis of young people’s readiness for parental labour, whether they have the necessary skills for this showed that young people aged 22-24 (i.e. potential parents) have insufficient knowledge for raising children. Respondents highlight a certain deficit of knowledge about children for their parents too.

In assessing their parents’ experience, young people often say in their essays that their parents managed to generally cope fine with raising them, “despite financial difficulties”. However, there are other views as well, for example:

Young woman, 24 years old: *“My parents had to use a lot of trial and error to deal with my personality and changes throughout adolescence... It was difficult to build a trusting relationship and share everything that was going on in my head”.*

Young man, 22 years old: *“I have an older brother, he is 3 years older. And the entire upbringing process, methods, ways, approaches and so on were “test-driven” on him. I was subject to certain experiments, but for the most part - he took most of the brunt”.*

Young man, 23 years old: *“Most likely my parents didn’t have enough knowledge of fundamental behavioural psychology and sociology. It may be to do with them only having vocational, not higher education”.*

Thinking about future parenthood, young people shared concerns about difficulties and a lack of specialist “parental skills”. Interestingly, many expect to learn about raising children from their parents, evidently not thinking about how quickly parental labour technologies are changing, which inevitably leads to the ageing of corresponding knowledge. Here are some essay excerpts:

Young woman, 22 years old: *“I have some information from friends and parents, but I couldn’t say that I know everything I need to raise a child”.*

Young man, 23 years old: *“I know almost nothing. When I start planning to have kids, I will definitely reach out to my family, they should share their experience”.*

Comparing parental labour then and now, our respondents state that this work has become harder (*“Raising children today has become harder. There is so much now in terms of entertainment, areas for development - and they want to do it all. New kids are somehow innovative. And parents need to accept this and play catch up to the needs of such children,”* writes a 23-year-old young man).

At the same time, we note that the perceived difficulties that accompany parental labour and the lack of knowledge is not seen by young people as a serious obstacle to having and raising children in the future. This is what a 24-year-old young man said on the topic: *“I am not sure that today I know enough to be a parent. But I am still developing as a person and I am not ready to take this step. I see my future children first of all as a continuation of myself, decent and well-mannered people, who will not only make me proud, but also make others around me proud. Children are the meaning of life!”*

3. Analysis of official Russian statistics for the past six years shows a rapid development of the system of extra-curricular education for children (table 1).

Table 1: Dynamics of indicators of the development of the system of extra-curricular education for children in Russia in 2012-2017

Indicators	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	Growth rate 2012-2017 %
Number of organisations involved in children’s extra-curricular education, units	8 371	10 410	11 549	14 022	13 723	12 892	154.0
Number of children involved in extra-curricular education activities, mln persons	7.973	8.866	9.593	10.021	10.017	9.618	120.6
Share of children involved in activities offered by extra-curricular education organisations (out of all children aged 5-16), %	47.8	52.6	55.7	56.1	55.4	51.4	107.5
Number of pedagogical workers of children’s extra-curricular education organisations, thousands of persons	183.0	217.6	241.3	298.4	295.7	273.3	149.3
Number of children per pedagogical worker	43.6	40.8	39.7	33.6	33.9	35.2	80.7

Source: *Federal State Statistic Service, 2018*, authors’ calculations.

Over the past six years Russia has seen a one-and-a-half-fold increase in the number of organisations offering extra-curricular education services. There has also been a significant growth in the number of specialists working in this field. We note that over the same period the state has given a 20% “easing” in workload for specialists in the field of extra-curricular education: if in 2012 one worker looked after almost 44 children, in 2017 this number fell to 35.

Our calculations showed that over one-third (34.75%) of all organisations offering extra-curricular education for children provide the whole spectrum of activities, 31% engage in sports, another 18.2% - arts programs (calculations by authors on the basis of *Education in the Russian Federation, 2014*). Parents and children are less drawn to programs aimed at developing environmental, technical, tourism and local history and military-patriotic skills.

We note that this data concerns only the field of extra-curricular education financed by the state¹ [1]. Yet this is only half of the children’s extra-curricular education market - for example, in Russia only 51.6% of parents don’t pay for extra-curricular activities for their kids (calculated using data from: Higher School of Economics,

¹ We intend to thoroughly check data about the state-funded extra-curricular education in Russia from 2018 and beyond in order to clarify whether the decline over 2015-2016 was only a temporary phenomenon or the start of a possible trend shift.

2014). Moreover, the marketization of extra-curricular education and the expectation that children are the “results of parental labour” today force parents to invest their money, time and effort in developing their children above and beyond the core education system. Perhaps the motivation to send children to more and more additional courses is - at least partly - driven by the parents’ presumption that these complementary skills are necessary and potentially useful for the children given the (growing) competition on the labour market.

4. Discussions

The analysis of empirical data shows that parental labour – like other types of work - is shaped by controversial trends. Child rearing becomes the domain of growing presence and the effects of marketization and monetization, as the welfare state is rolled back under austerity pressures. At the same time there is a strengthening societal perception of parenting as labour which (co-)creates crucial social and economic values, serves as a significant source of GDP, and enables dual empowerment - for both the parent and the child. Civil activism has growing importance for improving social conditions, to make them favourable for parental work, as well as to convince players of the labour market to accept and support parenting as work, which can play major role in counteracting the demographic decline.

This activism can capitalise on the current “global associational revolution” which turns civil society into a major of employment and GDP (Salamon, Sokolowsky and List, 2003), the importance of which is growing. These trends contribute to its transformation into a functional system of society that provides the “...stability for joint collective action ...for the common good and social coherence ...to solve those [wicked] problems that are not solved by any other part of society” (Reichel, 2012, p. 58-60). In fact civil society may act as a contemporary “third estate” and play similar role in the emergence of networked knowledge societies of the collaborative era, much as merchant capital did at dawn of industrial society².

These trends strengthen activism’s capacity to affect and (re-)shape the emerging digital “second economy” (Arthur, 2011) which brings about distribution, rather than production, of prosperity as the focal issue³. Indeed civil activism, which aims to enforce the increasing deployment into daily practice of the “glorious triad” of freedom, equality and solidarity, is able to promote innovative forms of distribution, similar to basic income (variants). Meanwhile it considers that: “Unconditional basic income is not “free money”. It’s freedom. And freedom belongs to all of us. It’s time for technology to serve all humankind. Jobs are for machines. Life is for people” (Santens, 2018). By promoting association-prone patterns of digitalization, civil activism contributes also to the effectiveness of parental labour in multiple ways. The digital technology provides the potential to decrease (standard) work time spent with - frequently repetitive and non-creative - wage work. Its enactment following the logic of social capital accumulation can also facilitate enacting free time and creativity liberated from (frequently repetitive) wage work through multi-coloured, creative voluntary activities contributing to improve (shared) life quality. These patterns of enactment can help to turn digital technology into a useful tool of empowering individuation (Grenier, 2006⁴), which facilitates overcoming and preventing, among others, children’s disempowering dependence on gadgets and (frequently commercial) applications.

The technology is embedded (Granovetter, 1985) in particular local cultures which can shape the patterns of its enactment (Orlikowski, 1992; 2000) by enabling empowering socio-economic developments that facilitate to overcome and prevent the re-emergence of mass-alienation pressures. Civil activism plays an important role in ensuring that technological development does not continue to generate social and environmental externalities, not catalysing the growing dominance of (perverse) upward redistribution (Milanovic, 2010; Piketty, 2014), and not accelerating mass-destructions constitutive of the emergence of Anthropocene (Heikkurinen, et al., 2017).

This activism, aimed the enhanced deployment of freedom, equality, and fraternity (currently coined as solidarity), historically was and remains intertwined with the industrial society’s emergence and development. It enforced new standards of declining work time and wealth redistribution by allowing spending a growing ‘volume’ of free from wage work time on voluntary activities - facilitating the improvement of (shared) life quality. Civil activism can enforce association-prone patterns of digitalization driving mutual approximation of market and public sectors and the civil society - i.e. the societal macro-sectors. The more cooperative become

² This important similarity is indicated by Professor Risto Tainio in connection with research on the civil society’s transformational effects.

³ The “...main challenge of the economy is shifting from producing prosperity to distributing prosperity” (Arthur, 2011, p. 6).

⁴ “...There is an important distinction between...- what could be called selfish individualism - and what is sometimes referred to as individuation ...Beck and Giddens...argue. Individuation is the freeing up of people from their traditional roles and deference to hierarchical authority, and their growing capacity to draw on wider pools of information and expertise and actively chose what sort of life they lead. Individuation is...as Beck points out... about the politicization of day-to-day life; the hard choices people face ...in crafting personal identities and choosing how to relate to issues such as race, gender, the environment, local culture, and diversity” (Grenier, 2006, pp. 124-125).

patterns of digitalization and macro-sectoral convergence the bigger is the probability to co-create a cooperative, sharing, and genuinely sustainable knowledge-driven society enabling successful exit from the Anthropocene (Heikkurinen et al., 2017). The association-prone institutional changes and relational dynamism that the civil activism promotes can simultaneously capitalize on and also facilitate growing societal recognition of parental work as a core (type of) value creation, a key factor in ensuring that (physical and intellectual) human reproduction fits into and operates as an important driver of association-prone institutional-relational changes following the social capital accumulation's altered logic.

The logic of social capital accumulation focuses on improving life quality by increasing the effectiveness of resourcing, i.e. co-creating associational advantage. These tendencies capitalize on the growing presence and significance of association-prone institutional-relational trends, which allow and presuppose the institutional dual primacy of a non-zero sum approach and interdependence. Overcoming the institutional twin-dominance of a zero-sum paradigm and resource scarcity view, characteristic of the market and public sectors, enables enhanced cooperation among volunteers, who aim to multiply and share resources by replacing dominance-seeking competition for their proprietary control. Due to this altered approach the volunteers perceive resources as sharable and multipliable rather than as per definition scarce and such alteration enables in multiple ways extending and upgrading the collective resource base. This change is a robust shift from the dominant perceptions arguing that the Economics is and should remain the science of alternative disposal of, per definition, scarce resources (Robbins, 1932). This approach explicitly "...rejected, the conception of Economics as the study of the causes of material welfare" (Robbins, 1932, p. 16-17). Such perceived resource scarcity was presented in social sciences as a "fundamental or natural law" since Economics was gradually "erected into the queen of all sciences" (Cobb, 2007). By contrast civil society capitalizes on - due to the primacy of social value and social capital accumulation logic - the extension and upgrading of the collective resource base. It allows replacing "...the deceiving cliché that the bottom line is the dollar with the essential truth that the bottom line is people" (Challen, 1998 cited in Stillman, 2006, p. 80).

5. Conclusions

Many developed and transitional countries face demographic challenges, which together with rapid deployment of new technologies characterized primarily by digitalization, generate tensions on labour markets. The empirical data indicate growing social recognition of parenting as labour. This change is also promoted by activism that capitalizes on transformational dynamism, typical of civil society. Such profoundly cooperative dynamism is intertwined with robust association-prone institutional changes. This feeds back into transformational potential and effects of the civil society entities' dynamism providing the capability to facilitate multidimensional, including socio-economic changes. Due to this capacity of social agency the civil society entities are able to contribute to long term emergence of a cooperative, sharing and genuinely sustainable knowledge-driven society.

Civil society entities are the domains of a very broad range of genuinely multi-faceted voluntary activities improving participants' shared (perceived) life quality. The volunteers are ready to provide contributions even unilaterally, since their motivation has multiple sources, including their interest in the particular (type of) activity and (frequently tacitly) also their wish to cooperate. The very participation in collaborative efforts regenerates and amplifies their readiness to participate. In fact their participation in the cooperation process can create as much motivation to volunteer as the success of the particular activity.

This combination of factors emphasizes similarities between diverse voluntary activities carried out by civil society organizations and parental labour. Both are perceived as crucial quality-oriented dimensions of life and are focused on social, rather than economic, values perceived to be of primary importance. Caring for offspring (as well as the elderly) is a fundamental component and task of human life both culturally and genetically, and therefore remains a focal issue for civil activism. This significance explains why civil activism provides increasing attention to facilitating increased acceptance by players of the labour market that parental labour is an important source and field of the highest social value, which ensures human self-reproduction in both physical and cultural dimensions. Our research assumes that this link enhances the probability that the observed increasing attention toward parental labour will continue to grow in the future among participants of the labour market as well.

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