

Changing vocational identities in Europe: reflections on how vocational identities are decomposed and reconstructed from the Czech Republic and Greece

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1. Introduction

This paper is one of a series from the European FAME project that is exploring a number of issues relating to changing vocational identities.¹ The project team is adopting what has been termed an ‘identity bricolage’ perspective.² That related to the idea that in the contemporary period older certainties and identifications have been eroded and that many tradition-based identities are decomposing, while societal openness and individual or personal choice in contemporary western-type societies is expanding. In a sense this is not entirely new, as since the mid-1960s we have been witnessing in parts of Europe the disembedding of occupational communities and the emergence of a more ‘privatised’ type of worker identity in the large metropolitan urban centres (compare Lockwood, 1966). However, the expansion of the ‘privatised’ type of worker has been intensified by the broad socio-economic shifts that since the early 1970s have assumed a societal-wide character in much of the West.

This period has been marked by the return of economic crises, the renewed intensification of competition, the spread of informatics, of the flexible specialisation paradigm, of flexibility and of the acceleration of globalisation, and the increasing importance of the tertiary sector in economic activities. In turn, such structural-technological shifts trigger labour market demands for greater flexibility and mobility that render redundant skilling processes that largely depended on on-the-job type of learning and were marked by temporal duration and continuity. By contrast, the newer demands necessitate and call for more formal type of education, training and skill acquisition that also involve a different, and much shorter, time horizon for learners. This, however, only highlights the fact that the identification with one's

¹ ‘Identity’ refers here to a connection between the ‘social’ and the ‘personal’ and to sense of sameness with some and difference with others, a feeling of ‘us’ and ‘them’. It implies an element of active engagement on the part of those that adopt a particular identity, an element of self-definition. At the same time, identity is constrained and circumscribed, and even shaped by existing social structures and processes (see Jenkins 1996; Sarup 1996).

² According to the Carruthers & Uzzi (2000) identity ‘bricolage’, “involves the decomposition of existing identities into their constituent components and their recombination into a new identity” (p. 486).

vocational milieu or community of practice that the earlier arrangements cultivated, and which was intricately linked with the development of vocational identity, is no more.

Parallel to this there is an analogous shift in occupational socialisation and/or its transformation. Therefore, it would appear that the processes just delineated inexorably lead to a loosening of existing work ethics and the occupational ethos. They overall lead to the 'corrosion of character', as Sennett points out (1998), to a 'fragmentation of identity' and/or the emergence of 'partial identities' (Flecker and Hofbauer, 1998, pp120-1), in other words to the corrosion of occupational and professional identities as we have come to know them.

It appears that in the new circumstances, individuals increasingly come to identify with the schools and colleges in which their short-term and discontinuous formal education and training is obtained. Accordingly, educational institution-related experience acquires a new, different and heightened importance when compared with the not so distant past, while the demand for flexibility may and does lead learners to pick up different skills and chunks of knowledge in variable and different contexts. Accordingly, their identification with particular milieus is more varied than it used to be and also more superficial. By extension, actors' vocational or work identities may become partial, multiple and, overall, less stable.

At the same time, because of the broader structural changes that have culminated in the contemporaneous triumph of the liberal democratic market paradigm, a tremendous lifestyle shift has taken place in the West and certainly in Europe. While work may still be a central life concern it appears that the opening up of various aspects of social life that used to be more circumscribed, or even closed to the common people, or 'protected' by an ethical 'social closure' mechanism (Parkin, 1971), means that the element of choice has been extended in everyday life. Increasingly actors, individually or collectively, find themselves in a better position than in the not so distant past, to actively shape their own profiles and identities, including their work-related identities.

As already argued, due to multiple social changes the development and formation of vocational identity has become unstable. However, in some European countries vocational and occupational identity still provides a basis for motivation and good work performance, commitment and quality. These identities are mainly conveyed by education, especially vocational education and training in countries such as Germany. In the three countries represented by the authors of this paper in contrast, vocational identities have, for different reasons, become relatively unstable.

Occupational, vocational or professional identity in the sense of membership of a community of practice or as a form of collective social identity differentiates the members of a certain vocational identity from those of other vocations or occupations. In addition, starting vocations have provided a biographic quality, which the mere job concept does not. But on the other hand, traditional vocational identities may be associated with more negative consequences like inflexibility in respect to work organisation and innovation because the vocational cultures are too closed and narrow and lead to resistance towards change (Kern and Sabel, 1994). One can see clearly, however, that one key aspect of identity relates to the way it functions as a form of differentiation and separation from 'the other'. There is a natural need of individuals for demarcation towards the other regarding the development and experience of identity. This includes and causes the urge for reliable social relations and places which supply the individual with a sense of identity so far as he or she feels connected to and part of one group but not of the other. One aspect of identity therefore is to hold on to demarcations, which may give rise to inertia or resistance towards change. Identity gives a sense of stability

during the multiple changes in life.

The process of identity formation has to be understood in a dual way. From an external aspect it shows society's offer of social roles (family, gender, social status, etc.) to the individual, while as part of an internal process the individual accepts, chooses or rejects to internalise certain roles. From a rather sociological perspective this is described as the interdependence of structural and individual aspects of identity formation. Already existent structures like occupations, with traditions and requirements for a certain educational background and qualifications, are set up independently of the individual. However, those structures, which of course change over time, do not necessarily fix the individual into a given structural path. He or she always has the opportunity to leave or reject for example an occupation, learn and meet the requirements of another or combine different elements of competing socialisation demands. To discuss and investigate the process of identity formation in a world of increasing and accelerating change, it may first be useful to review some basic theoretical concepts, which have been used to try to grasp the phenomenon of identity.

In *section two*, literature from social anthropology and sociology is taken up to interpret contemporary identity formation. It is also applied to illuminate changes observed with respect to work identity in countries in transition from state-socialism to capitalism. In the *section three*, there is an attempt by drawing from empirical material from semi-peripheral Greece to explore the importance of formal education and on-the-job apprenticeships in forging different kind of traits, whose educational and relational embeddedness, besides that of social class, constrains work careers and identities. In *section four* we have a model that explicitly strives to present the changes that occur in processes of occupational identity formation. The model is a dynamic one and is an attempt to visualise identity formation in a way that incorporates, as it happens, the basic features of such a process (that to a large extent have been presented in earlier sections). At the same time it strives to strike a balance between the contending characteristics and factors that shape identity formation today.

2. Contributions from social anthropological and ethnographic perspectives on identity formation

Social anthropology and ethnography scrutinised the concept of identity, individuality, and the Self in the context and vis-à-vis society and culture. We are going to look at some of theoretical considerations and assumptions of these fields which may be useful for the purpose of our research. During the last decades of the twentieth century two schools of thought have crystallised among the traditions of scholars in social anthropology and related sciences. They can be roughly defined as ethnocultural and modernity schools, the former presented mainly by Anthony Smith (1986; 1991), the latter by Ernest Gellner (1987; 1992), Benedict Anderson (1991), Eric Hobsbawm (1992) and others. The long-lasting debate has been around the nature of ethnocultural identity. Slightly oversimplifying the debate it can be said that *the ethnocultural school* sees identity as ascribed by a number of *objective characteristics*. The quintessence of *the modernity school* is that it understands identity as a conscious construction, resulting from modern socio-economic developments and the extended role of communication, and is mainly based on *subjective characteristics*. If we attempt to interpret both approaches in the context of our research on occupational identities, the dilemma lays around the issue of perception of occupations and occupational identity formation vis-à-vis the

society and individuals.

On the one hand, occupations may be perceived as pre-existent roles and functions, which are taken and performed by individuals. They are a certain summation of socially useful activities, performed on the labour market by specifically trained individuals. They pre-suppose a number of requirements in terms of education and skills, sometimes also experience and specific personal characteristics. Their structure is defined by the level of division of labour (Palán 1997, p. 89). They can refer to the vocational specialisation in education to a greater or lesser extent. The existence of occupations derives from the medieval history of the organisation of crafts, the formation of guilds with certain requirements towards membership, the industrial revolution and the establishment of a mass system of compulsory education. Therefore an occupation can be seen as being composed of a number of *objective characteristics*, whereby an individual's occupational identity is determined by such characteristics.

On the other hand, the job an individual actually performs rarely perfectly corresponds to the occupation for which the individual was initially prepared. Her or his identity can be entirely re-shaped in response to the work process and therefore is not related to a number of skills and competencies set out in initial vocational preparation. Her or his work-related identity then represents a hybrid of vocational qualification, previously performed occupational activities and the current work. Moreover, an individual may shape the duties and tasks imposed by job substantially and therefore may significantly contribute to re-conceptualising the notion of what it means to belong to a given occupation. Fluid occupations derive from the contemporary notions of the importance of multidisciplinary approaches, multiskilling, and shared occupations.

It is an often made observation of labour market analysts that there are occupations which do not fit into any ISCO specification or any other type of existing classifications. Nor are specific vocational preparations for such occupations in place. They become strongly subjected to the identity of individuals who perform jobs in such occupations and indeed sometimes exist only in their minds (i.e. only as a declaration of their occupation). Furthermore, the existence of the so-called empty occupations in classification systems and standard statistics has become a usual state of the art in labour market research. This means that occupations do not exist without individuals who perceive and declare association with such occupations. Purposeful creation of new occupations often derives from the purely subjective decisions of experts and practitioners, although driven by the objective demands of the labour market. Creation of the whole range of symbols relating to a specific occupation often appears to be a result of subjectively-driven action and may be in pursuit of or support for particular aspects of identity formation, such as an increase in the prestige of the occupation, encouragement of young people to develop their careers in the occupation, and so on. The same occurs also at a company level, where symbols and attributes of the company identity are promoted. Prestige can be artificially, that is purposefully, created or ruined. Symbols, the mythical code of societal perception, straightforwardly disseminated by mass media in the age of a communication society, become a powerful tool for the modification of demand and supply on the labour market and of occupational identity formation. Occupation therefore can also be seen as a highly *subjective characteristic* which mainly exists in people's minds.

Collective memory or, as Armstrong (1982) puts it nostalgia, can be seen as an image of a superior way of life in the past. Collective memory is therefore a myth or a symbol which

may be used to manipulate the sustainability of identities. Coal-miners in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe are a classic example of the influence of such a collective myth. Under the previous regime the interest in the engagement in the occupation was encouraged throughout the decades by the creation of the myth of the elite nature of this manual labour and a special pride developed that was characteristic of coal miners. After the change of regime and as a consequence of technological development old coal-mining areas started to decay and many coal miners became frequent victims of unemployment. The collective occupational memory supported their sustainable identities even in the face of unemployment, when they often firmly refused to go through retraining courses and to engage in a different occupation, as their collective myth had still stronger influence over their identity than any alternatively suggested³.

Symbols serve to promote the distinctiveness of the social group; they may have real or false meaning. Eric Hobsbawm (1992) called a proactive approach in the creation of common myths the 'invention of tradition'. These are the 'symbolic rather than the material aspects of common fate that are decisive for identity' (Armstrong, 1982, p. 9). The myths are powerful and once created and sustained in a longer run, are difficult to be further shaped, altered or abandoned. They may easily transform into stereotypes that are particularly lasting. For instance, in a number of occupations the gender segregation is not driven by any individual physical or emotional skills or qualification factors but is mainly driven by such stereotypes. To alter them it is necessary to invent a different myth, code of symbols, and eventually even the tradition of supposedly different gender experience inside the given occupation.

Identities can be represented in a *dynamic way*, where they are not constant over time. In pre-modern, mainly agricultural and feudal, world, identities were tightly linked to social roles, where an individual was related to a work-and-bread giver socially, politically and economically. Work was tightly linked to the person's social relations, her or his status and identity (Gellner, 1992, p.140). Under capitalist economic relations work became contracted, whereby the person was politically freed. Tough economic relationships of early capitalism still preserved a high rate of interdependence of work and social status. This provided for relatively static identities. The pace of technological change did not exceed the education cycle, and qualification to perform in an occupation as such was often obtained only on-the-job. Qualifications usually served as the basis for a life-time occupation.

With the high rate of technological development and innovation of the modern economy education could not manage to supply up-to-date qualifications for the demands of the labour market. Some nations therefore opted for a liberal and flexible system of vocational preparation, putting a stress on the output, or competencies obtained, rather than the process of education as such (typified in the Anglo-Saxon approach). Other countries relied on their traditions and integrated practical work performance into their standard education and training system (as in the dual system). The latter system supported a higher weight of educational preparation in the process of occupational identity formation and promoted integrated vocational ('education driven') and occupational ('employment driven') identity (as is the case with the German *Beruf*). This, however, did not prevent the further separation between occupational status on the one hand and social and economic status on the other hand.

³ It can be furthermore argued that the state and the private sector in these countries exactly failed to offer any strong alternative myth or symbols to make other occupations with persistent difficult-to-fill vacancies attractive in order to develop strong positive occupational identities and to encourage workers' engagement. Financial incentives are helpful but often insufficient or impossible to implement.

The current pace of technical and economic innovation implies a complex division of labour, permanent changes in economic organisation and in the nature and distribution of jobs, and therefore 'inherent and inescapable occupational mobility', which is imposed internationally on all countries (Gellner 1987, pp. 93, 95). This imposes a gridlock on the labour market: on the one hand an ever greater mobility is demanded from the labour force, on the other hand in developed countries with a reasonable level of affluence and welfare provision the labour force cannot be impelled to move to another region or country in search for work or to accept ill-paid and unattractive jobs even in the situation where they have poor prospects on the labour market.

Another important development is that traditional occupations demanding a full-life commitment are dying out. This was previously expected of domestic servants, whereas now even workers in elementary occupations perform duties (including services) defined in time, space and function and preserve free time for leisure activities rather than engage themselves into an enduring on-the-site service (Gellner, 1987). Uniform training and socialisation, the creation of mass culture, universal communication along with a certain level of accumulated wealth in the society support harmonisation of life-styles across the hierarchy of occupations and the continuing separation of work and rest of one's life. Indeed one can easily find successful entrepreneurs and blue-collar workers from affluent countries spending their vacation in the same fairly standard hotel. 'The liberation from economic vulnerability and subjection' (Gellner 1992, p.142), the continuing separation of work and the social life beyond it, and homogenisation of life styles brought about greater freedom from identities linked to social roles.

The aforementioned pattern is especially widespread in the countries with a strong welfare provision and therefore a greater security irrespective of her or his work placement. Under a more liberal Anglo-Saxon system, in spite of doubtless harmonisation of life styles across occupational groups, occupational status still determines social and income status to a greater extent than, for instance, in Germany. In the latter occupational insertion does not have such a direct impact upon social status and such significant implications for life style. Peculiarly it is precisely the uniformity of the German system of training and socialisation which perhaps has contributed the most towards blurring differences between social strata and the creation of a universally shared culture. To complete the circle, the German vocational identity is composed around the appeal of the symbols of *Beruf*, no matter whether their origins are truthful or mythic. The symbol of the *Beruf* is the prestige of vocational preparation, the meticulously developed dual system of education with norms and traditions supposedly going well back to link with the past glory and spirit of guilds and craft trade education.

The countries in transition to a market economy have been transformed from reliance upon the system of a strict match between educational specialisation and subsequent occupation and work performance. Furthermore, occupational status had been deeply linked to social and economics status. Social status inconsistency was typical for such societies: the manual occupations were artificially overpaid and granted social respect with the help of ideology and mass media at the stake of highly educated people who were constantly underpaid and socially downgraded. As a result of the extreme pace of change and demands for occupational mobility of the labour force in the transition period, the requirements of work performance demanded re-training, multiskilling or simply performing different or new occupations. Identities therefore have become much more actual work-driven. Harmonisation of social status inconsistency by an increase of the social and income status of the highly

qualified and a decrease of the respective status of blue-collar workers has not been completed yet. Separation of work and social status in these countries as a next stage of advancement therefore has not yet become a mainstream development, also largely due to the lack of financial resources for a more generous welfare provision and low wages.

The Japanese approach to work-related identity formation presented a different template from that of any European country. Until recently the dominant pattern, at least for large organisations, was that these companies provided lifelong security for their employees. Economic, social and political status had there a much higher degree of correlation as they were amalgamated through attachment to the company. Identities were more stable, less conditional and dynamic, and they were linked to the company than to the occupation performed or vocation obtained during the process of educational preparation. In some respects a similar pattern can be observed in a large - often multinational - companies worldwide with thorough HRD strategies, stress on investment in people, systems of additional benefits for employees, provision for common leisure activities, membership of clubs, etc. Commitment of such companies to their employees is expected to produce a higher commitment of employees to work performance in the company and engenders company-driven, rather than occupational, identities.

The world of work is more mobile than education, and though the border is blurring and the distinction between the two spheres is less clear than it used to be, this results in more unstable or complex professional or work-related identities, compared to the more stable vocational (education related) identities. The deliberate conscious identity of the role developed according to the traditional education-related view of the vocation among young school leavers results in inconsistency when individuals are faced with the more varied requirements of real-life performance. Unless the initial identity is shaped enough to correspond to multiple social roles and multiple work-related performances, the successful placement and/or performance in the labour market is uncertain. The dynamism of identity however is not only contextually influenced. The dynamic aspect of identity formation and development must be considered at different levels: individual, group, structure, society, etc. and scrutinised as a complex phenomenon.

The increase of the number of shared occupations, multiskilling in the framework of job performance, and the creation of hybrid occupations (e.g. European car mechatronic) assume insertion of people into various communities of practice simultaneously. The development of a *complexity of work-related identities* for individuals has therefore become much more common. An important observation here however is not merely that a person belongs to several social groups but that they are often incompatible in some respects (Cohen, 1994, pp. 8-9). This imposes additional complexity upon the individual Self. In the context of our analysis it is important to bear in mind that within performance of her or his work, a person may belong to very different communities of practice where not all of them are indeed totally compatible. There may be for instance a case of an active member of a trade union who in certain circumstances may find herself or himself caught in a dilemma of loyalty between the internal rules and hierarchy of the company and the successful execution of her or his representative function. With the growing mobility across occupations and professions horizontally as well as vertically between job positions and social hierarchy, the complexity of work-related identities may deepen.

Progress towards more modern forms of work organisation with highly complex internal structures (e.g. teamwork, project-based teams across traditional sections of

organisations, interdisciplinary interdepartmental work) may also be combined with stronger links to outside-organisation communities of practice. Insertion of the Self into incompatible communities of practice in fact may partially explain why we can observe horizontal hierarchical structures and a semi-independent mode of work in many companies, even larger and relatively complex ones. Under such conditions employees try to preserve their individuality whereby various communities of practice overlap only in her or his work, where the borders of the incompatible may only impose certain discomfort in someone's self-identity but not in identification with the communities of practice. Gellner (1987) considers that 'a society which was simply occupationally mobile, but in which each person carried out her or his work without numerous and unpredictable contacts with many other people, would find it easier to combine its mobility with *inegalitarianism* identity' (p. 97). Under the present conditions and along with further separation of occupational and social statuses, a specific form of social egalitarianism occurs at a company as well as at a societal level. This idea could be linked to Sainsaulieu's affinities-mobility model (1977).

It was post-modernism since late 1970s which scrutinised anthropological and ethnographic writing on the formation of self-identity and added to previous research some important observations. Several of them seem to be useful for our analysis. Identity is not merely a complex notion but it is also *a synthetic concept*. As Cohen puts it referring to the tradition of American social psychology, the individual's identity is ... 'a basket of selves which come to the surface at different social moments as appropriate' (Cohen, 1994, p.11). As a matter of fact identity is a form of stereotype where the image is generalised and neglects the diversity of the Self. 'What *we* are, or what the *other* is will depend upon context' (Cohen, 1994, p.10). Depending on the environment a person also identifies herself or himself in a more general or a more specific way. Declaration of occupation may correspond to the most detailed level of specialisation in a familiar surrounding (e.g. IT system analyst); in the ordinary environment the declaration would be more general (e.g. IT worker). At the same time this does not mean that any of the identities will be false or, to put it in another way, that there is only one truthful identity. They all may be perfectly valid. What is important, however, is that identities are not constant, they are fluid, conditional and subjectively modified.

This brings us to the conclusion that the context is an important analytical factor, and in spite of the subjectivity of the concept of occupational identity, there is a set of objective elements that directly influence identity formation. But is then identity fully determined by the context? What is primary: Self or Society? Although a maximalist approach of the school of determinism introduced the concept of 'selfless society' (Cohen, 1994, p. 27), Giddens (1991) represented a softer perception where he saw individuals as agents of society that actively reflect upon external conditions. Cohen argues that 'there seems little reason to suppose that sociality and individuality must be mutually exclusive...' (Cohen, 1994, p. 54). Indeed the work shapes the personality, the personality shapes the work. There is no doubt that the self is not an autonomous agent, it is socially and culturally constructed (Cohen, 1994, p.115) and there is a room for collectively imposed identity. Cohen, however, deeply disagrees with Goffman regarding his statement that the one exploits one's own experience of a lifetime in the performance of a role, and becomes increasingly more skilful in the role performance.

According to Goffman selfhood does not extend beyond the skills and imperatives of performance. Cohen argues that the individual possesses the ability of a conscious, purposeful act, of a choice of roles and performances, although indeed largely shaped by the roles imposed by the society and societal development as such. The choice creates the difference in the extent

of self-regulation. For instance, an unemployed person is put in a situation of constraints and limited choices, which results in her or his stigmatisation (Cohen, 1994, p.106). It may be, however, self-stigmatisation in the first instance, where the individual realises the limitations of her or his situation. The longer the situation, the deeper self-stigmatisation, where alternative identities (e.g. temporary unemployed but belonging to this or that occupation) may fade away. With the diminished life possibilities and belonging to limited communities of practice, paradoxically such an identity may become evermore stable and may lead to chronic frustration, anomie and exclusion.

Finally a number of aforementioned conceptual observations brings us to the conclusion that:

society may well be greater than the sum of its parts...But as an intelligible entity, it cannot be conceptualised as apart from the individuals who compose it, alone and in their relationships. So far as they are concerned, it is what *they* perceive it to be, and their actions are motivated by their perceptions of it....Similarly, ...symbolic constructions, are made meaningful and substantial by people's interpretations of them

Cohen, 1994, p.166.

'We should focus on self consciousness not in order to fetishise the self but, rather, to illuminate society' (Cohen, 1994, p. 22). This results in a methodological point: 'instead of moving deductively from society or culture to the individual, why not inductively, or, at least, experientially, from the individual to society?' (Cohen 1994:29). Therefore research on occupational identities among employees may indeed find it very useful to consider the life history inductive sociological approaches of Daniel Bertaux (1981, 1990), Zsuzsa Ferge and other scholars.

3. Education, Apprenticeships, Traits and Identity in Greece

In this section there is an attempt to deal with the issue of skill acquisition among skilled manual workers that at some point in their work life became independent. Their case is of some use in providing a conceptual framework that may assist in organising one's thinking about how skills were acquired in the not so distant past and what lies ahead as change undermines the 'old', more stable, ways. The norm used to be that skills that were learned on-the-job — a long duration process instrumental in forming work-based identities. It now appears that increasingly on-the-job apprenticeships lose their 'enskillings' importance, because of the rapid rate of technological change — at the same time the impact of on-the-job apprenticeships for the shaping of work-based identities, decreases.⁴

⁴ What follows in this section draws on empirical research that took place in 1988-1989 and in 1998-1999. 170 independent artisans were interviewed in Greece, most of whom were either machinists or working with garments (100 in the first period and about 70 in the second). These have been grouped into three social categories: artisans, smaller employers and larger employers. If an interviewee was occupied exclusively with managerial type of work (function of capital) i.e. was an owner-controller; s/he was considered a (capitalist) *larger employer*. If someone was more occupied with managerial work but still laboured manually, then s/he was considered a *small employer*; those undertaking

Interviewees with people from lower-class backgrounds acknowledged or implied that they underachieved at school or dropped out. On average the artisans-to-be began working at the age of 14; those of the older group today often started working when they were only 9, 10, or 11 years old. This implies that their prior orientation to work (Watson 1997: 100) was *not* in any way a matter of choice. They were obliged to work and, since they were minors, there was no question about any kind of contract between themselves and their employers — such considerations existed only in the minds of their adult guardians.

These artisans had a poor peasant, worker, or marginal urban petit bourgeois background. As such they may be referred to collectively as coming from the lower class.⁵ They developed (in the sense of growing up) within the context of their families language codes that were restricted when compared with those of middle, let alone upper-class youngsters (see B. Bernstein, 1975). When the lower-class children started school, these restricted codes and more generally their low-class habitus, which functions 'as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations and actions' (P. Bourdieu, quoted in Petmesidou-Tsoulouvi, 1984, p. 57), clashed with the authoritarian school that operates more on the basis of middle and upper-class codes and habitus — a position that has been upheld in Greece as in Western Europe (Frangoudakis, 1978). As a result, lower-class children tend to perform rather poorly at school (the class-relatedness of school failure has been demonstrated by authors such as P. Willis, 1977; see also I. Reid, 1986).

Failure at school and dropping out means that many of them did not progress through what J. Piaget has designated as the 'formal operational stage of cognitive development', which largely unfolds under the impact of formal education during early adolescence (from 11-12 to 15), and entails the acquisition of a capacity to grasp abstract and hypothetical ideas (Piaget and Inhelder, 1973 pp. 140-51; Giddens, 1990 pp. 73-76). They as a rule continued to think in more concrete terms, restricted their ability to master new complex knowledge and pursue alternatives that were at least nominally open to them. Any skills they wished to acquire were learnt while working. On-the-job apprenticeships involve learning by doing empirically by trial and error, and by repetitive application of partial work-tasks; it resulted in what has been termed 'specific traits' (to be discussed shortly). Meanwhile the more general aspect of the work, let alone abstract theory, remained almost entirely beyond them; here the contrast with the German dual system is sharp. This process of education and training operated a mechanism of exclusion that effectively channelled interviewees with a lower-class background into manual jobs — in sharp contrast with the education and overall trajectory of those of middle-class origin who later became the larger employers or petty capitalists (see Koniordos 2001b, p. 2). This indicates a close association between educational-cultural and social reproduction. Before presenting material relating to the would-be artisans' chances, I would like to briefly discuss traits.

On traits

Traits is a notion taken from psychology. It originally meant 'dispositions', or 'enduring tendencies within the individual to behave in certain ways' (see respectively Hampson, 1989; and Krech, Crutchfield and Ballachey, 1962 pp. 103-34). The notion has also been used in the

predominantly individual manual labour were considered to be typical *artisans*. With the exception of three, all remaining interviewees had businesses that employed from one up to 14 personnel.

⁵ The reader is reminded that terms such as 'lower' and 'higher' have an inherent indeterminacy. This is true of formal professional categories too (see Patiniotis 1996).

context of approaches to dual and segmented labour markets, initially developed on the basis of the U.S. experience.⁶ It links ways and types of skill acquisition to labour-market segmentation. In the latter context, traits have been defined as '... behavioural patterns which will be reproduced in response to a given stimulus in a particular type of environment' (Piore 1975, p.130), and are differentiated into specific and general.

A *specific trait* is a behaviour produced in direct response to a stimulus offered by the environment. It is acquired in a given environment by means of imitation and socialisation. Thus a specific trait acquired in the workplace by the process of on-the-job training, i.e. a productive trait, may be thought of as a *habit*.

General traits are sets of rules from which 'behaviour may be derived which enables an individual to deduce from the environment and the stimulus [at hand] what the correct response may be, although the particular combination of circumstances may never have been encountered before' (*ibid.*, pp. 130-31). Traits of this kind are generated either by induction from a series of specific traits, or are taught at various levels of formal education. If, however, general traits are to be retained, they must be reinforced by continuous on-the-job usage. Otherwise they may degenerate again into a set of specific traits.

It appears, therefore, that on-the-job training and formal education respectively seem to be responsible for the distinction between specific and general traits, and concomitantly for the distinction between the lower (semi-skilled, skilled, and part of the salaried ranks) and the upper tiers of primary labour markets (professionals and managers), which are also mobility chains.⁷

Workers in the lower tier in a 'seniority district' (lines of progression in blue-collar work found in medium and especially large enterprises) start their career (and mobility) by means of on-the-job training and progress as the job mobility chains move to the next station. This is closely related to the jobs they have previously held and/or to their pre-employment station, which is influenced decisively by family and class. By contrast, upper tier managers and professionals are in a position to occupy quite different and geographically dispersed jobs that are not related to the jobs they previously held. This is possible because they operate by employing an internalised code of behaviour made available by formal education, which involves their obtaining a set of general rules, i.e. general traits. High mobility among them serves the function of applying what they have learnt, and prevents the deterioration of general into specific traits.

Craftsmen, according to Piore, do not fit easily into the two-tier model of the U.S. primary labour market, although their mobility chains do seem to constitute a career ladder. While they would initially be included in the lower-tier segment, the fact that they often become 'supervisors, independent entrepreneurs, designers and innovators' indicates that in terms of job stability, variety and terms of pay they resemble the upper-tier segment. Craft jobs are similar to the jobs of ordinary production workers in that both types of jobs involve the mastering of specific tasks, picked up on the job. In that sense craft-workers and ordinary production-line

⁶ On primary and secondary labour markets and industrial dualism see Doeringer and Piore 1971; Piore 1975; Berger and Piore 1980.

⁷ '... The concept of mobility chains represents an attempt to formalise the intuitive notion that socio-economic movement in our society is not random, but tends to occur in more or less regular channels. These channels are such that any given job will tend to draw labour for a limited and distinct number of particular points [stations]. As a result people hold jobs in some regular order or sequence. We shall term such a sequence a mobility chain' (Piore 1975, p.128).

workers have similar mobility chains, but the former perform a much larger number of specific tasks than the latter. 'As these tasks accumulate, a certain number of craft-workers induce general principles from them' (*ibid.*: 133). It is this, according to Piore, that accounts for the craftsmen's mobility chains resembling those of the upper tier. But craftsmen are also different from managers and professionals in that their basic learning is specific. Even if they have acquired a formal education, it is likely to have accompanied their on-the-job training rather than preceded it, as is the case with occupations associated with upper-tier mobility chains. With respect to my own interviewees, it is clear that while certain independent craftsmen are indeed working from a set of general precepts, most of them will never be able to go beyond exhibiting a range of specific traits, however wide.

The usefulness of the notion of traits is that it allows us to decipher the importance of education and on-the-job training in the formation of particular types of skills/assets which, given the existing matrix of opportunities, orient would-be artisans in the selection of their subsequent paths. It is useful to distinguish traits (specific as well as general) as either technical or associated with administration, management, and commerce (henceforth referred to as administrative). Artisans as wage-workers should accordingly have amassed plenty of specific technical traits that they picked up on the job, obtained some general technical traits by attending low-grade technical classes, and some elementary-level specific administrative traits by observing what others did (e.g. their employers). Today's small employers would have had acquired some low-level general administrative traits, mainly by experience and imitation, as well as technical traits on-the-job and in technical schools. Lastly, the larger employers should be imbued with administrative general traits of the highest order, picked up in the organised enterprises with which they had a family connection, and/or in management training at college. These assumptions were indeed borne out in my sample of interviewees, as will be seen from what follows.

Education and Training

Formal education, one of the two ways by means of imputing general traits, has been assessed in terms of years of schooling and the types of school attended by the interviewees. A comparison of the average years of schooling (Koniordos 2001b, p. 6) shows that (with the exception of the small employers) machinists attended school about 1.5 years longer than did their colleagues in garment-making. The greater differential in years of school attendance is close to two years, and may be attributed to the traditional attitude towards women.⁸

The difference in length of formal schooling between the two trades may also be related to broader differences in their organisation. The length of formal education quite clearly correlates with type of proprietor, confirming in effect the traits hypothesis. The emergent pattern, the distribution of which conforms to the average, is that the longer someone has been educated the closer s/he approaches the capitalist type. Inversely, the fewer the years of formal education, the closer the resemblance to the artisanal type. The number of years spent in formal education is, of course, a flat criterion which says nothing about the quality of education received and therefore about the levels of traits obtained; it can only be assumed that the longer

⁸ According to the traditional but dominant perspective, girls and young women need not be well educated, since their main function is to get married, and for this an elementary education is sufficient. My 18 women interviewees, or two-thirds of the artisan contingent in the garments industry, accordingly attended school for fewer years than their men counterparts (for only 6.6 years on average, against 8.1 for the men).

the schooling, the more the material studied becomes more general, more theoretical, and the more the students become imbued with general traits. Relevant logical inferences may also be made on the basis of the type of schools attended, which will to some extent indicate the qualitative aspect of the education received.⁹

Closer study reveals the existence of several patterns (ibid., p. 7). As clarified in our discussions, most independent artisan and small-employer machinists took technical-school courses related to elementary and basic aspects of machining. Since they were earning their living during the day it was usually evening classes they attended. In other words, formal education exposed them to elementary general technical traits, while practical on-the-job training provided them with specific technical traits and a chance to apply the elementary general technical traits learned at school. These people were trained as skilled workers and craftsmen.

By contrast, there was little technical education in the garment trade. This is in part accounted for by the limited exposure of women to formal education, the over 55% primary education rate is largely due to them. It is also related to the character of the trade itself (often passed on to the apprentices in domestic surroundings), and to the overall state of the industry and the role of women in Greece. (On the linkages between the technical education of women and the labour market in Greece, see Patiniotis 1999).

The third pattern is that high-school, college, and university studies were followed mostly by today's capitalist-type of proprietors. This means that interviewees of migrant and worker family background received at best only elementary and/or minimal technical education to equip them for skilled jobs. Relying only on their technical skills/traits, their limited assets, and almost entirely lacking an education in administrative skills, they were obliged to keep to a specific kind of jobs, their greatest ambition being to become independent artisans. On the other hand, those of a more affluent middle-class background received a higher-level education and hence more general precepts, which prepared them for non-manual work careers. In this instance there was no lack of administrative traits/skills to prevent them from becoming petty capitalists. In consequence, the type of formal education received which, as we have seen, is basically a matter of social background and class provides people with differential assets that simply reinforce the pre-existing endowment and life chances.

Apprenticeships and Work Experience: the importance of skill

Given that the artisans, and to a lesser extent the small employers too, as a rule had no expectations of financial assistance from their families nor the prospect of a family business to inherit, they were forced to rely on whatever assets they could muster themselves. To a very large extent this meant acquiring skills. Skills were their prime asset, the means for obtaining the higher wages that would allow a certain amount of savings, and eventually these savings could be used as the capital to establish a business of their own. Once this was set up, skills were again the key factor: they safeguarded technical independence and kept down labour costs.

To be of maximum use to the artisan, the skills s/he acquired in the course of apprenticeships and working prior to establishing an independent workshop had to range across

⁹ For an overall discussion of Greek education and a detailed account of technical education in Greece see the work of S. Pasmazoglou (1987), pp. 240-79 in particular. It is worth noting that vocational education in Greece has to a very significant extent been imported from Western Europe (see Patiniotis and Stavroulakis, 1977)

a broad spectrum to allow tackling newly encountered work problems successfully (see Piore and Sabel, 1984, p.115). This way an artisan acquired a good name in the trade and attracted potential clients. If s/he did not have such a comprehensive grasp of skills, the prospective artisan could not expect to survive for long as an independent. Achieving a high level of skills, or in other words a capacity for innovative solution of work problems encountered, meant that craftsmen have moved from accumulating specific technical traits into establishing general technical traits. Of course, the range of skills they possessed also largely determined the particular type of products they could undertake to make as independents. Thus a machinist who set up to make general repairs had to be exceptionally multi skilled, in contrast to, say, a seamstress who sewed only shirts.

Technical skills were acquired by means of formal teaching and on-the-job apprenticeships. The interviewees acknowledged the contribution of formal education towards skill acquisition, though they did not appraise it positively in its own right. The emphasis in training was specific and practical; formal education was merely complementary to it. Acknowledgement of the role of the parents or relatives in the transmission of skills was also very limited.

The two main sources of acquiring technical skills were, therefore, work and technical school. The machinists overwhelmingly showed a proclivity for combining a longer and higher-level technical schooling with on-the-job training. While the work experience on its own also attracted a sizeable minority of machinists, it was of paramount importance for skill acquisition in garment manufacture. This agrees with earlier indications that in this area technical skills are mainly picked up on the job.

In practice, apprenticeships lasted considerably less than the traditional seven years (with the partial exception of that of small-employer machinists which did approach that mark). But whatever their length, complaints about them are as old as the notion of apprenticeship itself. The chief objection voiced was that for the most part apprenticeships functioned as a device to pay novices low rates while their masters extracted from them all they could and over an excessively long period, during all of which they were supposedly still learning new skills of the trade.

So what indicated the end of an apprenticeship? There was no specific answer to this, other than that the apprentice should have reached a sufficiently high level of proficiency. In the complete absence of any system bestowing credentials, this level had to be recognised by other qualified craftsmen. If they considered the apprentice as on a par with them, they exerted pressure on the master to confer the new status. In this sense the master artisan, although largely controlling the apprenticeships in his workshop, was restricted by the collective traditions of his craft community.

There is a marked difference in the length of apprenticeships between machinists and the garment trade. Evidence shows that especially the artisans and small employers in garments reported have worked as apprentices for a far shorter period, half or even less, than in machining (*ibid.*, p.10). This correlates with the already noted tendency of garment proprietors to attend school for a significantly shorter period than did machinists.

As already noted, the apprenticeships and overall work experience of today's larger employers, which usually took place in a family context, were very different from the analogous experience of those of more humble background. While for the former it was primarily a matter of learning the particulars of running an enterprise and the ways of commerce, whatever administrative (specific) traits the latter managed to obtain were limited to what they could pick

up by observing the more entrepreneurial members of their family and to their own rather limited formal education. The sum of administrative traits so acquired was entirely insufficient for a successful business career — as is proved by the continual and severe difficulties artisans are facing in the business world today. The situation of today's small employers was somewhat better than that of the artisans, chiefly because they had the benefit of longer schooling. However, since their focus had been particularly on the job technical training, they do not feel at home in the business world. I argue that it is this lack of early socialisation into specific traits and traits of a general managerial-administrative nature that acts as a block to the expansion of their enterprises. The above would suggest that there is a qualitative difference of emphasis in the meaning and content of their apprenticeships between today's artisans and small employers on the one hand, and larger employers on the other.

In summary, we can say as a rule machinists, by comparison with specialists in the garment trade, attended school for longer. They also underwent on-the-job apprenticeships that lasted twice as long as those in garments. Moreover, they worked more years for wages and for a larger number of employers before becoming independent than did their counterparts in garment-manufacture. This appears to imply that a *sine qua non* for becoming and surviving as an artisan in the acquisition of skills, particularly so in machining (machinists will tell anyone willing to listen that their craft is 'boundless'). A machinist's standard account of his craft's versatility and difficulty always included the statement that the number of machines one must know how to work with and to repair is very large, that one must understand the properties of the various grades of steel and other metals, that one should conduct experiments, that one should be in a position not only to work from drawings but also draw oneself a little, be imaginative, and so on and so forth.

On the other hand, the making of garments also requires expertise. The production of garments involves knowledge of types of fabric and their various qualities, designing the clothes themselves and their accessories (which requires something of an artistic flair), making up prototypes with which to obtain orders, and finally going into full production. The first and crucial step in actually making the clothes is cutting the cloth - one of the most difficult operations and a closely-kept secret.

The actual sewing implies mastery of the various techniques used for different types as well as parts of clothing, the ability to operate the appropriate machines, fine finishing, and finally ironing. While the production process ends there the commercial circuit remains to be completed, which means the wholesaling and/or retailing of the goods. This is a crucial aspect of working in garments, and requires special skills in displaying and selling the products. It is a much more important feature than it is in machining, where the norm of the bespoke production largely obviates such dealings.

It would seem, therefore, that the overall degree of difficulty between the two trades cannot be easily measured, and it is not even an issue here. Still, artisan and small-employer machinists starting or joining their independent concerns had a wider range of technical skills than did their garment counterparts. This is probably due to their craft technology being closer to science, obliging machinists to stay longer in educational and practical on-the-job training. This inevitably put them in possession of specific and general, mostly technical, traits and skills. By contrast, skilled garment artisans, due to the greater division of labour in their trade, were more restricted in their range of work-tasks. Small employers in garment-making, along with technical traits also display administrative skills as part of their qualification for becoming independent. It is this, as well as the fact that all of them are men, that gives them a profile

distinct from that of the same trade artisans, and distinguishes them from the much less notable disparities between different types of machinist.

4. A dynamic model of occupational identity formation

From the foregoing arguments it is clear that the FAME research needs to operate with a dynamic rather than a static model of occupational identity formation. This section will seek to outline what the components of such a model would look like. One key task then is to produce a model of occupational identity formation, which is sufficiently dynamic so as to recognise that there are continuities and changes to occupational identities over time. Such a model could be used to scrutinise how the occupational identities develop at a time when the roles of many those in work are undergoing great change. The processes whereby people develop an occupational identity, and learn the skills necessary to perform effectively in that occupation, are complex. The implicit model underlying common-sense thinking about skill acquisition is that there is a body of skills, knowledge and understanding that has to be mastered before someone can be considered skilled. This model highlights an important aspect of skill acquisition, but it makes the process appear as if it is a simple linear transmission process. This linear transmission process though can be problematised in a number of ways.

First, it is a static representation - it does not allow for changes to the body of skills, knowledge and understanding to be acquired. Nor does it recognise the longitudinal dimension to becoming skilled. That is, what it is to be skilled is different, to a smaller or greater extent, at the time you start on the process of becoming skilled from what it is when you formally complete the process. Second, the social dimension of becoming skilled is not emphasised. The skills, knowledge and understanding that an individual develops over time are acquired in particular social settings. The social context in which learning takes place needs to be acknowledged. Individuals learn with and from others, and help others learn, and the significance of this means that the process of skill acquisition needs to be placed in a social context.

Third, the body of skills, knowledge and understanding to be mastered is represented as external to the individual. This does not allow for the individual to be an agent in the construction of her or his own particular set of skills and understandings that he or she acquires. That is, even if individuals are faced with a similar (changing) body of skills, knowledge and understanding, how they go about trying to achieve mastery of that body of skills, knowledge and understanding may be very different. Additionally the process of acquiring an occupational identity takes place within particular 'communities of practice'. There may be a broad community of practice at the occupational level, but there will be more particular communities of practice associated with particular work organisations and education and training institutions in which skills are being developed. Indeed it may be that particular workgroups within an institution have typical ways of working that differentiate them to some extent from other groups.

From the above it is possible to identify what is required from a more comprehensive model of occupational identity formation in particular work organisations. It has to:

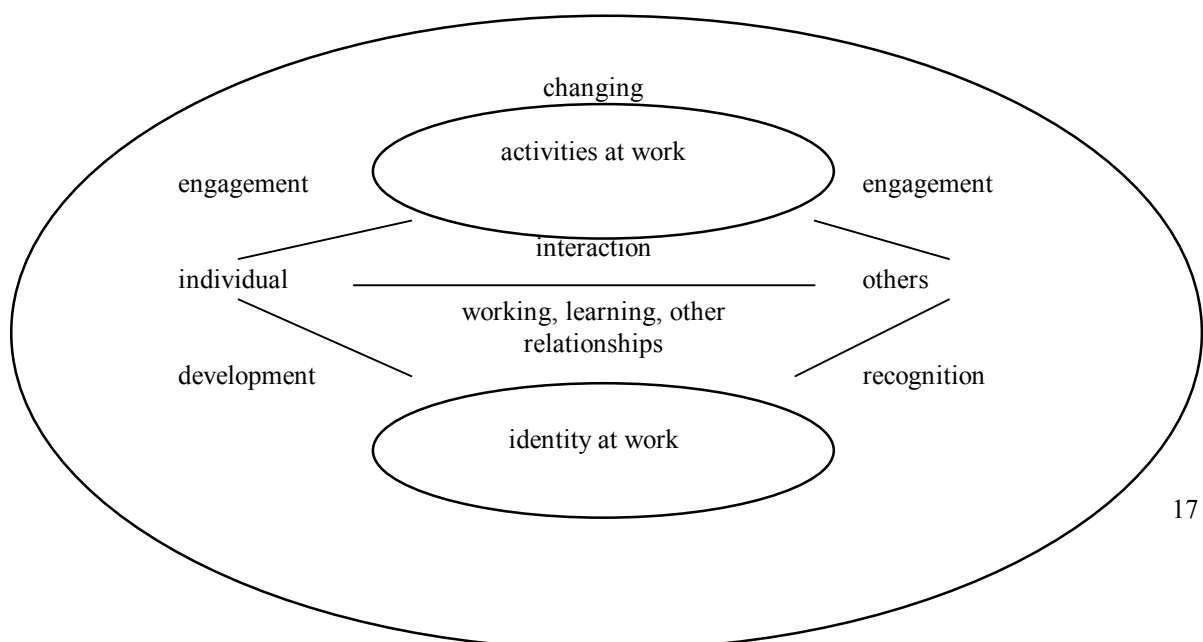
- be a dynamic representation, allowing for change and development over time;
- have a strong social dimension, whereby an individual learns, works and interacts with

others;

- allow the individual to be a significant actor in the construction of her or his own occupational identity;
- recognise the existence of general and particular 'communities of practice' associated with particular occupations and organisations, and acknowledges that these can operate at a number of levels.

Any model proposed needs not only an internal coherence, but also needs to engage with other theoretical propositions, if it is to offer a more general and comprehensive explanation. A diagrammatic representation of the proposed model is outlined in Figure 1.

What is difficult to convey in two dimensions is the dynamic, developmental nature of the model. The sets of activities at work and communities of practice and the identities they support are all changing. It is also important to remember that not all aspects of these activities, practices and identities are passively received by those engaging in them while in the process of becoming skilled. Rather the 'about to be qualified' and 'newly qualified' may play an important role in changing aspects of those activities, practices and identities. Indeed an understanding of such dynamism is required if a fundamental tension about occupational identity formation processes is to be recognised: that is, there is both continuity and change in how these processes work out over time.



becoming

communities of practice
3 dimensions: workgroup
institution
occupation

Figure 1: Model of occupational identity formation

Fundamental theoretical commitments underlying the model:

(i) *Learning as a social process*

An individual learns through interaction and communication with others. The process of learning though does not generate a single type of interaction. Rather learning takes place in contexts in which there may be multiple dimensions to the nature of the interactions: there may be a host of working and other relationships that have an influence upon the learning process. Individuals learn from a variety of sources and relationships. Not only are these relationships patterned differently, according to differences between individuals and contexts, but also the sheer variety in what, how and from whom learning occurs is sufficient to ensure there is not a linear transmission of learning. Changes in the particular constellations and configurations of influence and different patterns of relationships are sufficient to ensure that learning as experienced can differ significantly for different individuals even within broadly similar contexts. Thus learning is a social process, but with differential effects and outcomes on particular individuals.

(ii) *The significance of developing an identity*

When considering the formation of occupational identities, there are two traps for the unwary. The first is to assume a smooth transition into appropriate skilled work for those who complete their initial skill training. In some cases work would be found in a completely different occupation: in such circumstances the extent to which an individual feels he or she 'has' the occupational identity for which he or she has trained is problematic. The second trap is in thinking that the occupation in which young people are training always has particular significance for them. A young person may attach far greater importance to 'developing an identity' in a broader sense than to developing a particular occupational commitment. The distinction could be portrayed as the difference between 'making a life' and 'making a living'. When expressed in that way, it can readily be seen that the former is of greater significance, and that the extent to which the latter (occupational) orientation is a central component of the former may vary between individuals and over time. The net result of this is that it is necessary to keep in mind the significance of developing a broad identity. An occupational identity being just one of a number of smaller identities that make up the overall identity of an individual.

(iii) *Contested nature of experienced skilled worker status*

The above arguments have indicated that the process of becoming skilled is a social

activity, in which a number of others have an interest besides the individual directly concerned. While acknowledgement of formal status as a skilled worker may come through completion of an apprenticeship or similar status, both the individuals themselves and others may be wary of conferring the epithet 'fully skilled' at this time. That is, more likely to come when the individual and others recognise that he or she is an 'experienced skilled worker'. Indeed there will often be a negotiation of meaning, whereby you are only an experienced skilled worker when you yourself and others recognise you as such.

One clear sign of recognition comes when others (for example, clients, peers or trainees) turn to the individual for advice, because they acknowledge the individual possesses valued skill, knowledge, expertise or experience, which is acquired over time. External recognition can also come from management, through job grading and/or the type of work allocated to the individual or through the type of work he or she can get in the external labour market. Acquisition of experienced skilled worker status is contested in the sense that it is not clear at what precise point of time an individual reaches this status and because it depends on judgements of a number of people, who may be using different criteria in forming their judgements. However, besides external recognition an individual also has to recognise the value of her or his own skills. That is, he or she has to have a sense of self worth and recognition of and a belief that he or she owns significant skills.

(iv) *Entry into a community of practice*

The ideas that:

- learning is a relational social process;
- that processes of becoming skilled take place within a broader process of identity formation;
- and that recognition of significant achievement (and attainment of the status of experienced practitioner) is itself a socially mediated (or contested) process, dependent on the recognition of others and a sense of self-worth

all fit with the idea that a dominant theme in occupational identity formation is entry into a community of practice. That is, individuals are developing occupational identities that need to be related to particular socially situated, contextually embedded practice.

(v) *Interdependence of structure and agency*

There may be a danger that the idea of a community of practice is elevated to a position whereby the individual is seen as 'becoming' a practitioner, rather than just learning the practice, but it is still a matter of taking on identities and roles, which are pre-existent. Whereas in the proposed model, individuals may take a pro-active role in becoming a full participant in a changed community of practice, which has been partly changed by their efforts. Hence there is scope for individual agency to act upon the structures and processes in such a way so that a new community of practice develops.

Other key aspects of the model:

(a) *Individual engagement with (changing) activities at work*

Individuals learn how to engage in the activities at work in the way they do. Company management may have very clear ideas of what they considered to be appropriate ways for their skilled workers, and those in the process of becoming skilled, to engage with their work.

Individuals may react very differently to such expectations, with behaviours ranging from complete rejection to complete engagement. Between these extremes newly skilled workers may exhibit a wide range of attitudes and behaviours in the extent to which they engage with the activities they perform at work.

(b) Development of individual identities at work

The technical possession of the requisite skills, knowledge, understanding and expertise necessary to be considered skilled is only one component to the development of an identity at work. One major distinction between young people becoming skilled was the extent to which they saw themselves as active in constructing their own identity, and in how they perceived their developing occupational identity. Some young people rather passively accepted their place at work: they saw themselves as likely to be doing broadly similar work with their current employer for the foreseeable future. They were not operating with any progressive notion of career, nor did they have any great expectations of work. Their identity at work seemed bound up with being an 'ordinary' (rather than a 'special') worker: doing the job steadily, without entertaining thoughts of promotion or changing employers. On the other hand, there were examples of young people who were actively constructing dynamic identities, in which occupational success was an important factor.

(c) Engagement of others with (changing) activities at work

The above has emphasised the significance of the extent to which an individual engages with work activities and the type of identity at work that he or she develops. However, the reaction of others can also have direct or indirect effects on perceptions that the individual and/or others have on that engagement and developing identity. This is perhaps most marked when the work activities are themselves changing rapidly. A 'battle' between 'old' and 'new' ways of working, and ways of engaging with work, is common at all times, but is given greater impetus when there is major organisational and/or technological change in a workplace. This 'battle' may be given added spice, if the proponents of the different views represent an 'old guard' and a 'new guard', trained in different ways and with differing sets of skills and attitudes.

(d) Recognition of others in the development of individual identity at work

How they are perceived by other work-group members, managers, other workers, trainees, clients and so on can all be influential in the formation of an occupational identity and an identity at work for an individual. The judgements of others may not necessarily be consistent and, even if they were, people may ascribe different values to particular characteristic. Thus a thorough painstaking approach to work may be appreciated by trainees and some clients ('conscientious; professional'), but be seen as irritating by managers and other clients ('too slow'). The recognition of others can help shape, confirm or contradict an individual's developing identity at work.

(e) Interaction with others

The salience of the interaction between an individual and others in working, learning and other relationships is self-evident in any process of identity formation. The formation, development, maintenance and change of an occupational identity, and/or identities at work, are influenced by the nature of the relationships around which they are constructed. For example, recently skilled workers may still require the explicit support, encouragement and

advice from their peers to reach the standard expected of experienced skilled workers in that company.

(f) *Communities of practice*

That individuals who became formally skilled were in the process of entering an occupational community of practice was most evident in Germany, where the whole initial vocational education and training system is driven by the principle of '*Beruf*'. Individual organisations, however, can have their own distinctive communities of practice around which they structure their work activities and which influence their attitudes to training. Particular work-groups may have their own distinctive community of practice too. This is perhaps likely to be strongest where a specialist group is set up within a larger organisation, with people from a mix of occupational backgrounds, a different set of work activities and a different pattern of inter-relationships with other work groups. Such groups may consciously define themselves as 'special'.

Concluding discussion

>From the above it is clear that the overall model looks as if it can handle a number of key tensions in any attempted explanation of occupational identity formation. In particular it looks as if it can cope with the tensions that:

- there are elements of continuity and change over time in the processes whereby occupational identities are formed;
- the individual is a significant actor in the construction of her or his own occupational identity, but the process is not wholly subjective. On the other hand, individuals and their interactions with others are partly constrained by the structures and processes of the communities of practice in which they take place, but that these interactions over time may lead to the development of changed communities of practice;
- occupational identities vary in the intensity with which they are held, and in the significance individuals ascribe to them. That is, while they are central to our research, they may or may not be of great significance to the individuals we are tracking. On the other hand, the broader process of identity formation in the sense of 'making a life' is fundamental to all individuals.

Additionally the model fits well with an existing coherent theoretical framework, as put forward by Lave (1991) in '*Situated Learning in Communities of Practice*'. Her general ideas of:

- changing knowledgeable skill being subsumed in the process of changing identity in and through membership of a community of practice;
- situated social practice emphasising interdependency of agent and world;
- activity, meaning, cognition, learning and knowing being underpinned by inherent processes of social negotiation of meaning within a socially and culturally structured world;
- the way newcomers become old-timers as they develop a changing understanding of 'practice' through participation in an ongoing community of practice;
- the changing relationships of newcomers to ongoing activities and other participants

all serve to ensure that the focus is upon a dynamic process whereby occupational identities can develop and change over time.

5. Concluding Remarks

Identity is a broad notion. It has been applied with reference to issues of nationalism and ethnicity, work, race and gender; also of sexual orientation. However, the discussion of work-based identities has somewhat subsided as a result, one may hypothesise, of a more general shift in social science about the importance of work in the contemporary period. In particular, discourses currently in vogue (e.g. postmodernism) tend to relegate work to a less central role as a key life concern, than the one allocated to it by more structured social scientific discourses, be that functionalism or Marxism. Nevertheless, such claims may prove to be unsubstantiated.

The relative importance of work may be a contested issue, but this does not mean that work identities are unimportant. Identities do demarcate 'us' from 'them' and identification with a particular vocation is all-important for the shaping of the '*esprit de corps*' of each occupation and its specific ethos of work. Having said that it does not follow that identity formation has not changed today; the claim put forward in this article is that it has. What then has been the direction of change? This can be seen as the outcome of the interaction of a set of factors whose impact coincides with the emergence of a globalised, information driven, interrelated world. In particular, factors such as the micro-electronic technological shift, the economy's tertiarisation and the respective labour market demands for tacit skills, psychological work, competition and the emergence of the flexible specialisation paradigm and of flexible work practices, the consolidation of liberal-democratic institutions, the dominance of the market competitive paradigm, and not least the recognition that individuals have a right to personal choice, all appear to play a formative role at the macro-level. All these inter-relate in the particular contemporary conjunction to produce more opportunities for agents' more active engagement in shaping their work-skills profile and at the same time, at shaping their work-based identity. Their interplay has paved the way, or more causally has triggered, a rise of agency in our times, and this has consequences for the 'greening' of work identity as a segment of one's overall identity.

Related and triggered by such context-related factors, of direct importance is the expansion of mandatory schooling that takes place during adolescence (compare Erikson's recognition of adolescence as a period of crucial importance in work socialisation and antecedent identity formation). In fact, it is during this period that a large part of the shift under discussion has taken place. An outcome of this expansion has been that all young people are 'compelled' to alter the more traditional work trajectory. In the not so distant past, the latter included as an indispensable part of it on-the-job apprenticeships that would start in early adolescence, if not earlier. And on the job apprenticeships intermeshed with the particular's craft lore supplementing one another.

Today, such a function is taken over by the formal education. Today's youngsters today spend more time at school and encounter the world of work at a relatively later age, in their late-teens and beyond. The fact that contemporary youth has to attend formal schooling for longer means that the once dominant position of on-the-job training, within which young apprentices were imputed not only with skills but also with the *ways* of the trade and assumed their particular work identity, has now been eroded. The extension of formal education, either in the form of a generalist high school or in the sense of vocational or technical school, today

forms the main context in which socialisation other than the home-family related one takes place for the bulk of young people. Such contexts have their own 'lore', which is oriented towards the acquisition of *formal* certificates, in themselves a prerequisite if one is to become a member of an occupation or profession later in life. At the same time school based socialisation involves the positive appraisal, certainly to a degree far superior to the subjugation that took place in the course of on-the-job apprenticeships, of a critical stand which is seen to be part of an inquiring, science oriented, individual. By the same token this implies a more open orientation, one in which work identity is the outcome more of a personal trajectory rather than something ascribed by a role occupied in one's late childhood, at least in principle.

The new contemporary formula then seems to be this: the longer and broader education exposes young people to variable influences and that in itself makes possible a measure of choice in identifying with and from a variety of situations and practices, which in itself was not available in earlier periods. So, when entry to work comes, it is later than it used to be and the new entrants have already shaped, at least partially, an identity outside the work place.

This is generally true and applies also for the working class too. While in the end contemporary youths may still find employment in working class jobs, their longer exposure to other-different sets of rules than that of the craft-lore prepares them for a more individualist, independent, and perhaps more critical and detached stand than that of their craft brethren of a previous age who grew up as adolescents within the craft. The more 'clean' and services-like character of contemporary jobs, even of technical jobs in manufacturing, in itself an outcome of technological adaptation, change, and development, means that increasingly young workers need to obtain their skills formally. This means that they are increasingly exposed to what was earlier tagged as 'general traits', while obtaining some official credential. This in itself proof of possessing a set of skills and a clear move towards the professionalisation of industrial work. In fact, it is this association with a more formal training system transmitting abstract knowledge as well as specific work skills, which takes place at a later age that opens-up young people's horizons.

A critical element, which is also an element of choice, is thus cultivated and this in itself opens the possibility of shedding more actively (from the individual's point of view) the old ways and the identities that accompany them, and adopting, in a more *à la carte* fashion, new ones or recompositions of older ways and identities (this seems to be the idea behind the dynamic model of identity formation mentioned in section four).

Learning a trade and the parallel process of occupational identity formation do *not* occur in a unitary way, i.e. in basically the same way between members and offspring of different social classes. This is an instance of the importance of social dimensions as pointed out in the Greek case given in section three, and it should be seriously considered. And in fact the social background and setting distributes milieus and particular habitus' in divergent ways among different social classes and strata. For example, many working class kids will fail formal schooling and even fail formal education; it is largely from these that the working class is produced and reproduced. In particular those coming from a working class background are more inclined to be siphoned into the working class by getting themselves working class jobs than youths coming from a different social background (see Willis, 1977).

Not everyone can cope with the demands of the so-called flexible work environment, as R. Sennett (1998) has shown. A pool of people who have picked up their skills, largely on-the-job, is still available. These might have a particular problem, a difficulty, to shed their old skills to be retrained in new ones, in accordance with employer demands. A relevant example is that

of the skilled workers mentioned in section three, that refuse to respond to the new post-communist situation. Another one is the working class youth who fail formal schooling and who enter work as on the job apprentices in the more traditional way.

In addition, we need to keep in mind that shifts towards *à la carte* work identities in the developed European regions are not necessarily matched by similar developments in the less developed regions, either of Europe or in other parts of the world. In the latter, the burden of past practice is more overwhelming in the absence of pull factors as well as of opportunities to act differently.

Another dimension of vocational identity relates to the emergence of new professions. These are characterised by combining elements from two or more other, once distinct, professions or occupations. In itself, this is an outcome of technological progress (at least according to Charles Babbage's view of what constitutes), and in some instances such new professions appear to play a new generalist role and function, e.g. computer repairs. In fact this emerging *hybridisation* of new occupations (as noted in section three), involving new skills and/or new arrays of mixes of older and newer skills, imply accordingly that we must be seeing a hybridisation of work identity or identities. It is another instance in which this idea of reformulation or recomposition of identity makes sense as an ongoing early 21st-century process.

The present paper is certainly far from being exhaustive on the treatment of changing occupational identities (see, for example, other FAME project papers, including some presented at this conference). The overall attempt has been to see whether it is reasonable and useful to approach contemporary work of professional identity(ies) as processes of decomposition of old certainties and of ascribed roles. Such decomposition could then be followed by processes of reconstruction of new more partial roles and identities, ones in which human agency intervenes more actively than when compared with the not so distant past. From the socio-anthropological accounts presented in section two it appears that humans indeed have such a capacity to actively reshape their work-related identities.

As indicated (in section one) the profession/occupation remains a formative influence on identity today and it is only *one* such influence although, to reiterate the point just made a very important one. At the same time the higher emphasis laid on educational preparation is universally becoming a more permanent characteristic so that the whole process of acquiring the requisite work competencies is becoming 'education driven'. And one cannot disassociate this formal process from the acquisition of an identity that has an impact and relates to work. At the same time, its partial aspect is 'betrayed', in other words it appears that nowadays identity is recognised as a *synthetic* concept (Cohen, 1994), one that is composed of segments or parts. Therefore, the ideas of segmented, partial and multiple identity are now acceptable.

There is a shift from the more solidly structured and integrated situations of the past to the more open, fluid and agency-influenced contexts of today. The contemporary demand for increased flexibility and mobility of the workforce, a feature of the so-called post-industrial society, in itself is not a new phenomenon. For instance, it was customary and widespread among craft guildsmen during the late Middle Ages (see Koniordos 2001a, Ch. 1). However, the current situation does mark a departure from the one that was typical in the period of unqualified Fordist work regime, as noted in section two. The latter was marked at the shop floor level by low trust labour relations corresponding to a dedicated work organisation. Assembly line workers just had to do what they were told. Working for them meant following the rules and receiving in return a remuneration package that was more or less guaranteed.

The spread of the new flexible specialisation paradigm, which has accompanied the increased use of new production technologies, in turn, has meant a marked shift in the kind of work tasks demanded of workers. Work tasks became more versatile, knowledge-based, hard if impossible to oversee and this meant that the old direct control practised at shop-floor level was becoming redundant; bureaucratic control but in particular internalised worker control became more important. Aligned with such a shift came the call for high trust labour relations in the context of which workers are given a substantial degree of discretion in how they work. The shift has as a prerequisite that worker self-control has to be grounded in an internalised ethic that workers have been exposed to and picked up in the course not of on-the-job apprenticeships but, because of the character of the dexterities demanded from them, through formal schooling. Such an ethic resembles very much and indeed is none other than the work identity that develops in the course of the professionalisation of a particular occupation. Professionalisation is built by bringing together a common experience among members of study, research, examination, the acquisition of official credentials and certification. It also involves membership into a self-regulated professional organisation that controls its members on the basis of a code of practice and is marked by a specific outlook or claim according to which the members of the particular profession perform a socially necessary and important function.

In the Greek example given in section three there was an attempt to shed some light on the cognitive-learning processes under way in explaining shifts in identity. For this purpose the patterning of skill acquisition as these are related to 'traits' was examined and some quantifiable evidence (years and type of schooling) was used to show that they broadly influence work experience, as their effects in the formation of different types of entrepreneurs reflect this. It provides some indirect evidence of the link between formal schooling and the acquisition of general traits; a process that implies increased work autonomy may be seen an empowering factor for the contemporary youths. A much-needed synoptic, while internally coherent, way to delineate the direction of the movement towards a recomposition of work-based identities is to be found in the *dynamic* model of identity formation presented in section four.

This paper has been an attempt to bring together a number of perspectives that share an understanding of contemporary identity formation as a structured process. On the one hand, as a process that is configured by systemic constraints that shift and change under the impact of broader social processes and factors related to the conjuncture. As a process in which actors have an enhanced capacity to actively shape their vocational (and other) identities, on the other.

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