

## CREATIVE PRECARIETY: FLEXIBILIZATION OF WORKING CONDITIONS AND GROWTH OF PRECARIOUS CREATIVE EMPLOYMENT IN SLOVENIA AND SOUTH KOREA

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### ABSTRACT

*Along with the growth of creative economies, one can observe the phenomenon of increasing precarious work, which follows young individuals engaged in creative activities. The working process of creative individuals is very flexible in terms of schedules, place of work, and payment. As such, they often do not belong to the traditional (i.e., economically and socially stable) employment setup, which was usually organized around huge firms or institutions in the public sector. Instead, they tend to self-employ and quickly move from project to project, assignment to assignment, and job to job. Although some have described this as a type of desirable ever-changing lifestyle, such a work profile could be also described as precarious self-employment: a condition of existence without predictability or security, affecting material and/or psychological welfare. On the one hand, their work offers freedom, independence, and creative space, but it also has possible side effects manifested in a decrease in social security and an increase in stress due to work overload. Based on employment and wage statistics, this article analyzes fluctuations and changes in the social status of specific groups of creative workers in Slovenia and South Korea. It is assumed that intense employment restructuring points to the growing global trend of precarious working relations in the creative sector.*

**Keywords:** precarization, creative workers, flexible employment, working conditions, Slovenia, South Korea

## PRECARIETÀ CREATIVA: FLESSIBILIZZAZIONE DELLE CONDIZIONI DI LAVORO E CRESCITA DELL'OCCUPAZIONE PRECARIA DEI CREATIVI IN SLOVENIA E COREA DEL SUD

### SINTESI

*Con lo sviluppo delle economie creative si è venuto a verificare il crescente fenomeno del lavoro precario che accompagna giovani impegnati in attività creative. L'attività lavorativa dei professionisti creativi è molto flessibile in termini di orari, luogo di lavoro e pagamento. Di conseguenza, i giovani professionisti spesso non rientrano nel quadro occupazionale tradizionale (ossia, economicamente e socialmente stabile) che solitamente è organizzato attorno a grandi imprese o istituzioni del settore pubblico. Invece, la tendenza è all'auto-impiego e passaggio rapido da un progetto all'altro, da un incarico all'altro, da un lavoro all'altro. Nonostante alcuni lo descrivano come uno stile di vita allettante e in continuo cambiamento, tale profilo lavorativo potrebbe essere definito anche come lavoro autonomo precario: una condizione di sussistenza imprevedibile o insicura che influisce sul benessere materiale e/o psicologico. Pur se da un lato tale lavoro offre libertà, indipendenza e spazio creativo, è ricollegabile anche a possibili effetti collaterali che si manifestano in una diminuita sicurezza sociale e in un aumento dello stress dovuto al sovraccarico di lavoro. Basandosi sulle statistiche sull'occupazione e quelle salariali, l'articolo analizza le fluttuazioni e i cambiamenti della condizione sociale di gruppi specifici di professionisti creativi in Slovenia e Corea del Sud. Si parte dal presupposto che la profonda ristrutturazione dell'occupazione sia sintomatica di una crescente tendenza globale ai rapporti di lavoro precari nel settore creativo.*

**Parole chiave:** precarizzazione, professionisti creativi, flessibilità lavorativa, condizioni di lavoro, Slovenia, Corea del Sud

## INTRODUCTION

The shift from Fordism to post-Fordism has changed the face of precarity. After the industrial revolution, precarity was mainly associated with the labor force on the social periphery, which had less access to education and to economic and cultural resources. Due to these circumstances, such labor groups were forced to engage in manual, physically demanding, and low-paid work. Fordism was characterized not only by precarious working relations, but also by a more-or-less distinctive employment and wage hierarchy. Stable mass production and standardization of the production process allowed Fordism to form sharp hierarchies between workers with various educational and working skills. The post-Fordist period, starting in the late 1970s and represented by a flexible mode of production in which capital is circulating and searching for the best conditions to maximize profits, changed these relatively stable production circumstances (see Harvey, 1989; Amin, 1994; Scott, 1997). Today's increasing demands for a flexible labor force led to a rebalancing of working groups at the opposite ends of labor market segmentation. Talented creative workers engaged in prevalently non-material, mentally demanding, and complex activities with erratic and individualistic working schedules, became in terms of "flexploitation" (Gray, 2004, 3); that is, low pay, high blackmailability, and intermittent income, gradually equalized with groups of pink-collar workers in prevalently manual, low-end services, working under formalized monotone schedules and employment norms.

Creative work may indeed offer independents or freelancers the advantage of flexibility and adaptability, building professional portfolios that can be transferable to different business networks and different clients. However, creative work often makes for "bulimic careers" (Pratt, 2002), in which there is a boom and bust pattern with people working long days and nights when a project is underway, and then breaking until the next project (Kong, 2011). The precarity pole thus de facto extended from "peripheral," educationally non-demanding jobs to the formerly stable "core" jobs of knowledge professionals (Hardt and Negri, 2004; Virno, 2004).

The increasing precarization of formerly privileged creative workers raises numerous issues about social and economic inequalities. Although the creative industries, often referred to as the creative economies, are becoming an increasingly important segment of urban economies, employing increasingly more people (Landry and Bianchini, 1995; Bairoch, 1998; Scott, 2000), the inequalities remain an insufficiently analyzed element of the production process. The advocates of transition to a knowledge society strongly and occasionally without reflection promoted the increasing share of employees in creative industries. According to the United

Nations (2010), creative economies in Europe are growing 12% faster than other sectors of the economy, and they currently provide around five million jobs in the European Union. In South Korea, the "value-added inducement index" and "employment inducement index" in the input-output table of the social account in sectors of the creative economies are 43.6% and 12.1 persons, respectively, compared to 26.9% and 10.1 persons for other sectors of the South Korean economy (Lee, 2011). This means that the sector of creative economies is very active and growing quickly. With the number of creative workers increasing, the creative industries are promoted as a valuable tool for diversifying the local economic base and replacing jobs lost in traditional industrial and service sectors (Howkins, 2001; Florida, 2002; Hesmondhalgh, 2002). However, the consequences and influences of this sectoral shift on working conditions are not well analyzed. From this perspective, according to various authors, discourse promoting creativity and entrepreneurship as the "new economic savior" has gained the characteristics of a "myth" (von Osten, 2007; Raunig *et al.*, 2011; Minichbauer, 2011; Kuster and Tsianos, 2011), which mystifies the pleasant sides of flexibilization, but on the other hand neglects or ignores the collateral damage found in precarization of working conditions.

The flexibilization of the workforce in creative industries may indeed mean optimization of production costs in economic terms, but may also exacerbate social inequalities. Unequal access of various creative groups to resources gives rise to new forms of previously unimagined divisions (Gill and Pratt, 2008). The new lines of labor division are now formed on the basis of categories such as age, ownership, and payment. The division between younger, precarious, non-owning outsiders and insiders – who belong to older generations, have a stable job, long-term contracts, and accumulated resources, and perhaps own a company and still enjoy relatively high benefits from public social services – are giving rise to new conflicting social, cultural, and generational tensions based on the distribution of resources. This article takes a detailed look at the current socioeconomic status of specific groups of creative workers in Slovenia and South Korea. The intention of the article is to compare changes in the socioeconomic status of creative workers in selected societies and discuss what the consequences of labor flexibilization may be. It is hypothesized that the comparison of employment and wage statistics in Slovenia and South Korea may show that similar precarization patterns are present in culturally, socially, and economically different environments. Based on the accumulated data, further analysis is performed to determine whether the flexibilization of working conditions in selected countries really offers greater working autonomy to creative workers engaged in cultural activity and offers them a more independent lifestyle.

## PRECARIETY WITH STYLE: SELF-PRECARIZATION AS PART OF THE PRODUCTION PROCESS

The identification of creative economy as the new development paradigm by many national governments and global bodies (e.g., DCMS, 2001; UCLG, 2008; EU, 2010) led to the formation of similar creative-industry policies that try to popularize employment in creative economies as a path to self-development (Ross, 2009). A number of creative job institutions, career centers, online platforms, and official publications advise young graduates to “take personal risks such as applying for voluntary positions and unpaid internships in order to gain much sought-after work experience” (Ferreri and Graziano, 2014, 3). This popular discourse suggests that employees need “to be creative, whatever the job” (von Osten, 2007, 52) because only proactive engagement will allow individuals to improve their work skills to compete on the labor market. Furthermore, freelancing, combining short-term contracts, temporary work, part-time jobs, self-employment, and other varieties of flexible work are often presented as a form of increased working autonomy, where instead of working for somebody else you become your own boss by “making” rather than “taking” a job (Gunnell and Bright, 2011, 1).

It is a short path from the image of self-development to self-precarization if access to resources, information, and stable working conditions are not met over a period of time. From this perspective, precarization of creative workers is often realized through self-precarization, where better pay, social stability, and adequate working conditions are transposed into an indefinite future. Whereas the standard understanding of precarization ascribed the “responsibility” for the lack of predictability and instability in terms of job security and material or psychological welfare to the employer (i.e., the owner or manager of a company), self-precarization goes a step further. In the case of self-precarization, “personal responsibility” on the part of the employee is emphasized much more, and the employer expects the employee to “self-regulate” and practice “sovereignty at the subject level” (Lorey, 2011, 85). Self-precarization is based on strong motivational factors that gently force creative workers into a non-optimal working relation. They include:

1. The factor of working autonomy: achieving working autonomy is usually a long-term process that involves a lengthy accumulation of experiences, resources, and social networks that allow stable working operation. In the context of flexibilization of the labor market, in which companies easily access the labor force and reduce indirect labor costs, this process of long-term working preparation and learning is no longer in place.

The market risks are directly transferred to workers, which is why some creative workers prefer to gamble with self-employment in order to potentially “produce better ways of life than waged labor” (Bologna, 2007, 1). For a large share of creative workers, the idea of the “autonomous worker” (Lazzarato, 1996, 140) is based on the expanding capabilities of new technologies and digital networks that allow very flexible organization of creative work but at the same time also increase the “supply” of creative workers on the market.<sup>1</sup>

2. The factor of informality, or “coolness” in working and living relations: working autonomy is strongly connected to the desire for greater control over one’s time and freedom in working and living relations. Conscious rejection of the standard work routine reinforces the image of working autonomy and allows the formation of new eclectic lifestyles and work schedules. The rejection of standard work routines also includes a presupposed change in the level of formality in relations at work (Kuster and Tsianos, 2011). Flexibilization of work did indeed increase the level of informality at the workplace (i.e., at home or within multi-functional, shared working spaces, geek houses, and other spaces that allow social networking between creative groups). The informal mode of communication between creative workers at the workplace offers the image of equalization and dissolution of rigid hierarchies that existed in Fordism, although the working hierarchy between employers (i.e., owners) and employees remained the same. Even more, the payer of the creative workforce retains the right to dictate the level of communication that the employees voluntarily subordinate themselves to if they want the job (Lorey, 2011).
3. The factor of fear: flexibilization of work created new opportunities to combine working and living conditions not deprived of fear. The new paradigm of productivity may include informality, but it also puts creative workers in extreme indeterminacy, which produces a moment of fear that forces creative workers to work even harder. Due to the “external relationship to the institution: the demands on the skills and abilities of the subjects are immediate and equal,” which results in “an increase in productivity and the activation of the abilities employed” (Kuster and Tsianos, 2011, 93). The fear introduced through flexibilization of work is immediately translated (i.e., “recoded as pleasure”) through the filter of working and living autonomy, which in turn provides temporary

<sup>1</sup> This is especially evident in the case of IT workers or the so-called “cybertariat” (Huws, 2003, 24–42) that forms on digital platforms, which are used for high-tech outsourcing, distributing “bite-sized jobs to web workers for micropayments” and where “social rights are differentially assigned according to location in the high-tech occupational hierarchy” (de Peuter, 2011, 419).

satisfaction to the creative worker. In a society in which all workers are poorly paid, *“the ‘precog’ is a pragmatic adjustment to flexploitation”* (de Peuter, 2011, 421). Defined as a nonstandard cognitive worker with a prestigious occupation but laboring under standard precarious conditions, the precog camouflages the fear through *“imitation of power, which in turn, behind the patina of its arrogance, conceals the anguish of a rabbit caught in a trap”* (De Carolis, 1996, 42).

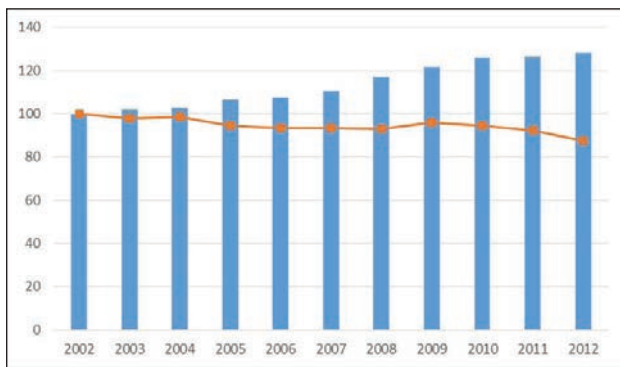
All three motivational factors that softly push creative workers into self-precarization are interrelated and cannot be separated from each other. The factor of working autonomy includes (or may be connected to) informality, a specific lifestyle, or a fear of doing worse and losing flexibility in the organization of living and working conditions. In other words, the individual is embedded in a specific context of “structural constraint” (Giddens, 1984, 173–177). Structural constraint is a situation in which an individual is in a position to choose between different options but, due to certain personal and societal motives (i.e., motivational factors), immediately narrows the choice. The individual acts within an environment that offers him different options to satisfy certain needs, but he always decides to choose the option that he thinks will bring him the most benefit according to the context. The individual does not calculate its benefit on a strictly rational basis, but formulates it according to an internal perception of “costs and benefits” (i.e., it depends on one’s personality). The mechanism of self-censorship that leads to the phenomenon of self-precarization is thus a complex product of wider social processes, personal choice, and other specific contextual circumstances that the creative worker is embedded in. Due to these factors, self-precarization is much more difficult to analyze in comparison to standard precarization, in which the relationships between the employer and employees are sharper, more distinguishable, and thus easier to define.

The possible combinations of self-precarization in creative activities in both countries are numerous and in many cases hidden by other factors or camouflaged by the same practitioners, who do not want to expose or change their existing lifestyle. As such, the intention of this article is not to discuss all aspects of self-precarization, but to explore specific layers of self-precarization in order to show that various forms of creative precarity are part of a larger global trend that can be found in various parts of the world.

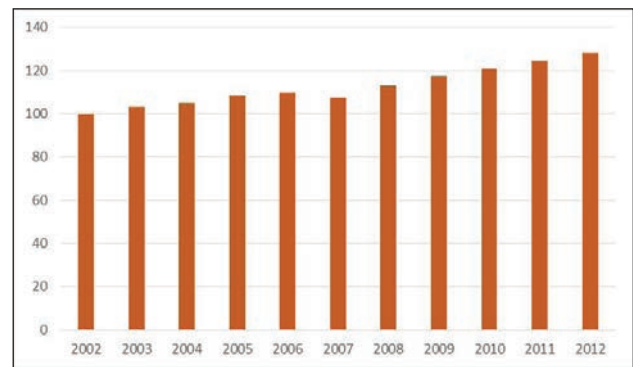
In the context of Slovenia, all three self-precarization factors play an important role inside the creative sphere, with each factor being more emphasized in a specific category of creative workers. The influence of a specific factor depends on various variables such as age, education, economic status, social capital, and other factors. From this perspective, an older experienced journalist that is forced to work as a freelancer due to the low avail-

ability of stable jobs cannot be identified by the same self-precarity motives as a young, just-out-of-college architect, who may want to have more working and living flexibility. Similar phenomena can be detected in South Korea. Since the late 1990s, the central government has implemented various policies that try to include highly differentiated age and occupational groups in order to meet the demand for a more skilled workforce in the creative industries. Simultaneously, less emphasis was placed on preventing the side effects of these processes, which can be recognized in self-precarization tendencies of the creative workforce. Despite the apparent splendour of creative sector-related jobs, there are many problems, such as vulnerable working conditions, a low income level, limited chances of career development, and instabilities of jobs because of the high mobility of jobs, inconsistent career trajectories, short-term employment contracts, and multiple jobs (Whang et al., 2006; Choi, 2008).

Although the physical, cultural, historical, and institutional settings in the countries compared are not the same, similar structural changes were implemented during the last two decades, which makes them comparable on specific dimensions. The cross-cultural comparison of transnational precarization and local responses to it in selected countries demands a research approach that is not linked to precise standardization and direct comparisons of results from different case studies, but is instead a comparison of the structural relationships between various forms of inequality regarding working conditions. From this perspective, we are not interested in a direct comparison between the two countries, but a comparison of similarities, differences, and changes in the structural position of creative workers and the self-employed in relation to previous periods. In short, of interest is whether restructurings brought by post-Fordism and flexibilization of working relations similarly influenced the structural position of creative workers in both countries. In the last three decades, both countries experienced a turbulent transition period in which they promoted a neoliberal policy in order to boost economic growth and urban development. Although they used different intensities to spark their economic restructuring, to a certain extent both countries neglected the social consequences of rapid economic change. For example, health, income, jobs and earnings, social connections, subjective wellbeing, and work and life balance in South Korea are visibly below the OECD average (OECD, 2011; 2013; 2014). Regardless of less sharp income inequalities, low poverty indicators, and higher unemployment rates in comparison to Korea (OECD, 2011), after quick transition and short period of economic growth Slovenia experienced a similar disintegration of social support networks as Korea. From this perspective, both countries can be placed in a comparative structural position with regard to work changes and the precarization process.



**Graph 1:** Number of employees (blue columns) and average monthly pay (orange line) in cultural production by year (calculated on the basis of 2002 = 100).



**Graph 2:** Number of self-employed in cultural production by year (calculated on the basis of 2002 = 100).

#### ANALYZING PRECARIZATION OF CREATIVE WORKERS IN SLOVENIA AND SOUTH KOREA

Analyzing creative precarization is difficult not only due to hidden aspects and motives that force creative workers into self-precarization, but also due to the complex definition of creative activities themselves. Standard definitions of creativity are linked to creative industries,<sup>2</sup> which are tightly connected to creative occupations, and not to activities, which may largely expand the group of creative workers. According to some authors (Cunningham and Higgs, 2009; Cunningham, 2013; Hearn, 2014), creative workers are found across all working sectors and not only in creative industries. The problem of current methodologies that try to study creative economies is the difficult gathering of data connected to creative workers embedded in workplaces beyond the core creative industries. Such workers may work in retail,<sup>3</sup> manufacturing, health, banking, or mining, and they may be deeply engaged in creative activities but not included in the statistics as part of the core creative industry. Moreover, the majority of analyses also do not follow the “narrative” or “knowledge flows” (Isaac, 2008); that is, how people with specific educations change between different occupations over a period of time.

The argument that follows from the difficulties in defining creative workers makes the field of creative precarity even more difficult to analyze. If creative workers are found across a variety of economic sectors, their precarity levels may differ according to the context. Due to difficulties in acquiring data and defining the extent of creative work, this article focuses only on one segment of creative workers. More specifically, it pays special attention to precarization among workers in various types

of cultural activities that are part of the core specialties in creative occupations. The analysis includes data for core specialists in cultural production occupations (e.g. film, television, radio, the performing arts, music, publishing, animation, and the visual arts) and creative service occupations (e.g. the arts, sports, and leisure services).

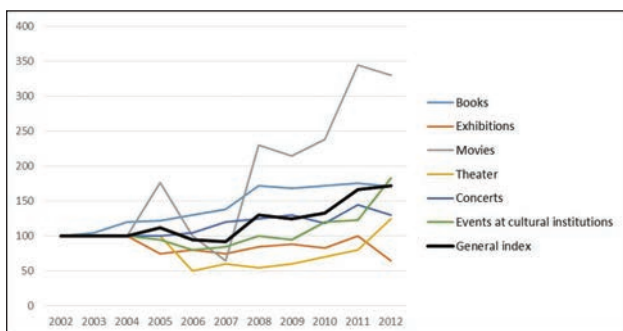
#### Precarization of creative workers in Slovenia

The analysis for Slovenian workers in cultural production was prepared on the basis of data acquired from the Slovenian Ministry of Culture (2015a, 2015b) and the Association of Arts and Culture NGOs and Freelancers, or Asociacija (2014). Their data were calculated both on the basis of SURS (the Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia) and AJ PES (the Agency of the Republic of Slovenia for Public Legal Records and Related Services), whose data are classified according to the statistical classification of economic activities (SKD, or Standard Classification of Activities in the Republic of Slovenia), which is in line with the Standard Classification of Economic Activities in the European Community (NACE Rev. 2). Although the definition of cultural production based on the standard classification of activities is not perfect due to the fluidity problems in creative activities already explained, it still offers sufficiently accurate general insight into the basic status and trends of creative workers in Slovenia.

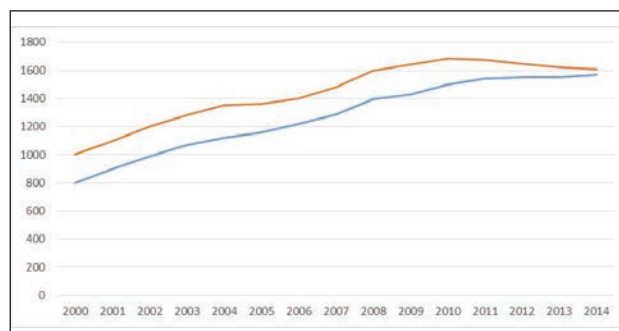
The data, which include a comparison between the number of workers in cultural production (publishing, music, performing arts, television, video and radio, and events at cultural institutions) and their average monthly pay by year, show a surprising trend of increasing disparities between the two indicators (Graph 1).

<sup>2</sup> The industry segments that are generally agreed to define the creative industries are architecture; design and the visual arts; music and the performing arts; film, radio, and television; writing and publishing; advertising and marketing; and software and digital content (see DCMS, 2001).

<sup>3</sup> For example, retailers in fashion may need special creative skills in order to sell any product or offer services for which style, experience, branding, or cultural expression is a component of the job.



**Graph 3: Various types (books, films, theatre, concerts, exhibitions, events) of cultural production by year (calculated on the basis of 2002 = 100).**



**Graph 4: Comparison of average gross monthly pay in cultural activities (orange line) and all other activities (blue line) in Slovenia by year (in euros).**

The total number of creative workers in cultural production increased from 2002 to 2012, which is relatively surprising due to the reduced public funds for cultural activities and the crisis in the cultural products market that decreased consumption of cultural products (Asociacija, 2014, 25–27). Furthermore, the high intensity of public media reports using negative connotations to describe the effects of the economic crisis on work in the cultural sector are believed to influence further employment in cultural production. As the number of cultural production workers increased, their average monthly pay simultaneously decreased. The trend of disparity is evident because the monthly pay gradually fell over the ten-year period. The disparity points to the elements of precarity in working relations because the number of employees increases regardless of the deterioration of their economic resources and presumably living conditions. The elements of precarity in cultural production are even more evident when the data on monthly wages are combined with other data, such as the index of self-employment (Graph 2).

The data show a trend of a gradual rise of self-employment in cultural production, which can be explained by a shortage of jobs in other areas. Less offer of jobs in other areas increases the instability of workers in culture, which is already marked by a decrease in private funds and great dependence on project work, short-term contracts, and other temporary engagements. The instabilities in the cultural sector force the growing number of workers engaged in culture into strong competition for the remaining funds. The result of this competition is the growing output of cultural production in the final period (see the general index in Graph 3).

The combination of data that include information regarding the number of employees, self-employed, monthly pay, and output represent the context of precarization in cultural production in Slovenia. The data show that, alongside the growing number of (self)employed, their economic resources decreased regardless of the greater productive output. High competitiveness in culture and the decrease in public and private (market) funds for cultural production force workers to ‘work more for less’,

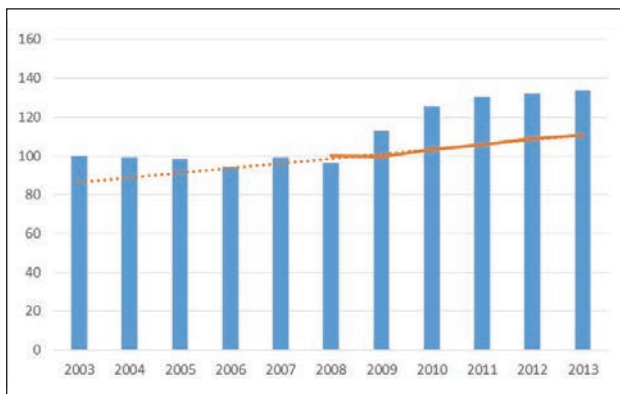
which can be described as a prototype of creative precarization. Similar elements of creative precarization can also be observed in other fields of creative production besides cultural production; such occupations also include ‘creative service occupations’ such as advertising, marketing, architecture, software design, digital content, and other services (Graph 4).

Graph 4 presents the narrowing gap between knowledge workers (i.e., creative workers) and employees in other sectors in Slovenia. The narrowing of the gap in average monthly pay between the two categories of workers points to the shift in the precarity pole, which is moving from “peripheral” educationally non-demanding jobs to the formerly privileged jobs of knowledge professionals (Hardt and Negri, 2004; Virno, 2004). “FI-exploitation” (Gray, 2004) affected the socio-economic status of creative workers, which is especially evident from the decrease in monthly pay, which fell from 123% (in 2000) to approximately 105% (in 2014) in relation to monthly pay in other economic sectors (Ministry of Culture, 2015b, 32).

#### **Precarization of creative workers in South Korea**

For the analysis of Korean creative workers in cultural production, data were obtained from the Korea Statistical Office on-line data system (KOSIS, 2015) and Content Industry Statistics for various years published by Ministry of Culture, Sport, and Tourism. The definition of creative jobs in South Korea and their concomitant Korean Standard Industrial Classification (KSIC) is slightly different from the Slovenian case and offers general insight into the current status and employment trends of creative workers in South Korea.

The data show the comparison between the number of workers in cultural production (publishing, comics, music, movies, animation (i.e., character), arts, sports, and leisure services) and their average monthly payment by year. Similar to the Slovenian case, the results show a surprising trend of widening disparities between the two variables (Graph 5).

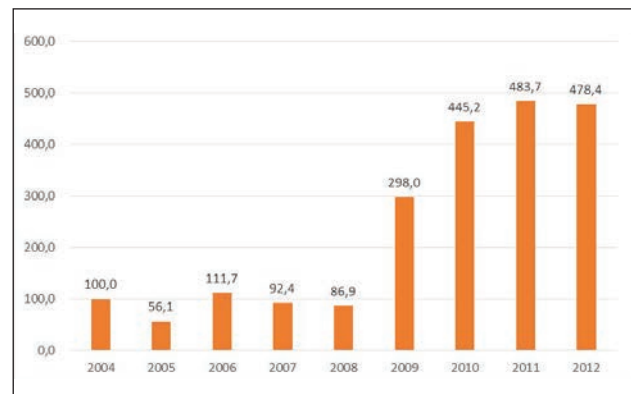


**Graph 5:** Number of employees (blue columns) and average monthly pay (orange line) in cultural production in South Korea (calculated on the basis of 2003 = 100 for employment and 2008 = 100 for monthly pay).

As shown in Graph 5, the total number of people employed in cultural production increased by 33% between 2003 and 2013. One reason for the sharp increase is the government's policy to use cultural industries as a generator for rapid economic development of Korea. The Korean government, in which close coordination of economic development is extensively regulated and controlled, tried to promote cultural industries as an engine of growth. This decision was based on the fact that cultural industries have more of an economic spillover effect than manufacturing or other service industries, they are easier to use to formulate initiatives for industrial growth, and within each region cultural assets can be identified and used as good sources for industries (Kim, 2011). As the number of cultural production workers increases, their monthly pay in cultural sectors gradually rises. However, the growth rate of monthly payment in the cultural sectors is still increasing more slowly than in other sectors of the economy in South Korea (Lee, 2011).

The creative sector in South Korea is in general composed of very diverse characteristics of service industries that contain varied and heterogeneous subsectors, characterized by high mobility in employment patterns, seasonal variations, apprenticeships combined with low starting pay, and freelance jobs. These features of precarity in cultural production are even more evident when the data on salaries are combined with other data such as the index of self-employment (Graph 6).

The number of self-employed in cultural production dramatically increased from 2004 to 2012, especially from 2009 onward. The group of self-employed in the cultural industries in 2012 is almost five times that of the group from 2004. The year 2009 shows a dramatic increase of more than 300% in relation to the previous year. In 2007 and 2008, the Lehman Brothers-driven global financial shock hit the Korean economy, which resulted in a sharp decrease in employment in almost all sectors of the economy. Since 2009, the Korean government has



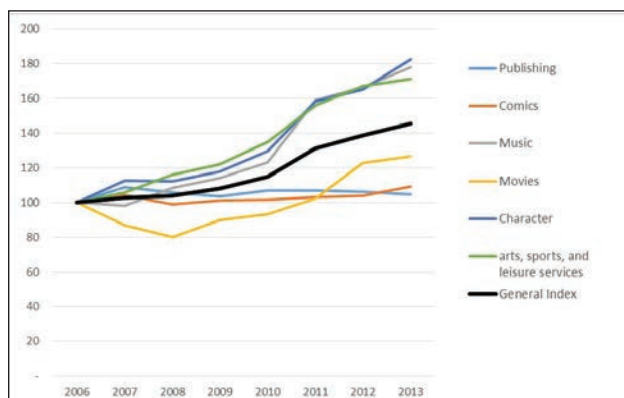
**Graph 6:** Number of self-employed in cultural production in South Korea (calculated on the basis of 2004 = 100).

tried to boost the economy by utilizing two major policies related to promoting cultural industries and encouraging job creation in cultural industry sectors motivated by the rising Korean Wave (*Hallyu*) in East Asia (Sung, 2015). Another policy to promote startups and support self-employed cultural industry sectors might gradually contribute to the rapid increase in the number of the self-employed in cultural production (Kang, 2012).

These abrupt ups and downs in the number of the self-employed in cultural production vividly reflect the instability of workers in culture and strong competition for freelance jobs and new projects. These features of precarity in cultural employment can be further explained by a comparison of data from various subsectors in cultural production.

Graph 7 shows changes in cultural production from 2006 to 2013. Generally speaking, all sectors in cultural production increased from 2006 to 2013. Especially the publishing industry shows an intense increase in production in comparison to other cultural industries. The growth of cultural production usually depends on the flexible production of creative (i.e., unique), personal, idea-centered, and lifestyle-bound products, their long-tail distribution, and the rise of consumption driven by symbolic and social motivations (Hartley, 2005). Even though it seems that there has been a quantitative expansion of the cultural industries based on higher valorization of culture and more intensive connections (i.e., active embracing of digital technologies and culture), the data also show that along with the growing number of self-employed their job security decreased and seasonal variations and instabilities increased in parallel with the increase in cultural production.

Combining the data shown in Graphs 7 and 8, it is possible to see that those working in cultural industries received higher pay than workers in other industries. Even though there is no distinctive trend found in the gap of monthly pay between workers in cultural industries and other industries, the differences between the two

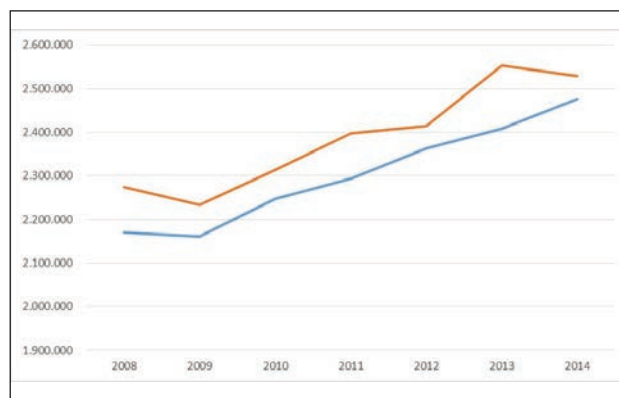


**Graph 7: Various types of cultural production by year (calculated on the basis of 2006 = 100).**

groups are decreasing. This assumption is based on intense fluctuations of the average monthly pay in cultural activities in South Korea, which indicate that the cultural sector is highly volatile and places employees in unstable and thus precarious positions. Workers engaged in cultural activities suffer from unclear career paths and need to constantly acquire new skills to market themselves. Other forms of precarious characteristics also include irregular payments, a lack of health insurance (which is usually provided by employers for regular staff), and a lack of intermediary institutions that set rules, define roles for employment, or act as mediators in times of conflicts.

#### DISCUSSION: A COMPARISON OF PRECARIZATION OF CREATIVE WORKERS IN SLOVENIA AND SOUTH KOREA

A comparison of data from Slovenia and South Korea shows an interesting picture of different employment statuses in the creative sectors. Although the data analyzed are not completely comparable due to the different structure of cultural production statistics,<sup>4</sup> the data still show the general trends in cultural production for both countries with sufficient accuracy. In comparison to Slovenian ones, South Korean cultural production workers not only earned more but their monthly payment also slightly increased in the period analyzed: 2003 to 2013. The increase in monthly pay in the Korean case points to the fact that the work performed by cultural production workers is highly respected in the sociocultural and business environment of Northeast Asian countries. At the same time, the data, similar to the Slovenian case, show that employees' cultural production increased in the period



**Graph 8: Comparison of average monthly pay in cultural activities (orange line) and all other activities (blue line) in South Korea (in Korean won).**

analyzed. Being paid according to the quantity, quality, and complexity of the task performed is thus still a non-negotiable standard in economically highly developed Northeast Asian countries such as South Korea and Japan. Such differences point to deep historical, cultural, and institutional differences between the countries analyzed. Regardless of these socioeconomic differences, various elements of creative precarization that are the consequence of the larger (i.e., global) trend of flexibilization of working conditions can still be found in both countries.

Flexibilization of the workforce on the global scale may eventually lead to very similar consequences in terms of undesired social, economic, and political changes. For example, in comparison to Slovenia, the number of self-employed in cultural production in South Korea rose sharply. In the case of Korea, this is even more remarkable because the total share of the self-employed in the Korean economy has been slowly declining in the last decade (World Bank, 2016) in comparison to the Slovenian case, where it has been slowly rising.<sup>5</sup> The break is especially evident between 2008 and 2009, which may be explained by the intense wave of the economic crisis that hit Korea in that period. An intense break may have radically shifted the perception of the employment status of cultural production workers (Kang, 2012). Although monthly pay for cultural production workers is still a non-negotiable standard in Korean society, this may not be true any longer for long-term contracts, which ensured stability and wellbeing for employees. The flexibilization of the production process in the creative sector is rapidly introducing a new standard based on short-term contracts and periodic employ-

<sup>4</sup> In the case of South Korea, specific segments of cultural production have a different role in comparison to the Slovenia. For example, comic books or animation (i.e., character) are presented in this regard as special segments of South Korean cultural production, which in the case of Slovenia included the segments of movies and books.

<sup>5</sup> For example, the share of the self-employed in Korea in 2013 was 27.4%, whereas in Slovenia it was 16.9% (World Bank, 2016).



ment according to companies' needs<sup>6</sup> (Minns, 2012). Although they are still being paid proportionally to the work performed, only rare young newcomers in cultural production may expect the formerly usual and expected long-term contacts. In a very competitive economic environment combined with harsh competition on the labor market, permanent employment contracts once represented a form of social buffer, which is now slowly disintegrating. This introduces the same types of instabilities and pressures on the creative workforce in both Slovenia and South Korea, and highlights the increasing precarization of working conditions.

Similar instabilities can also be detected in the comparison of monthly pay between workers in cultural activities and other economic activities. In comparison to the Slovenian case, the Korean case does not show a consistent trend of narrowing the gap between the two categories, but instabilities can be still detected. In the Korean case, the gaps between the categories tend to narrow in times of various crises and then return to the original shape when the economic climate improves. This variability stresses the importance of keeping different types of jobs rewarded accordingly, but also points to the increasing adaptation of employers to market changes. In this case, market instability increases payment flexibility, which is accordingly translated in narrowing of the gap between the two categories during various crises.

#### CONCLUSIONS: CREATIVE PRECARIZATION AND DETERIORATION OF RELATIVE WORKING AUTONOMY

The analysis of employment and wage statistics from Slovenia and South Korea revealed various fluctuations and changes in the social and employment status of specific groups of creative workers. Despite the sociocultural differences between both countries, similar trends and effects that stem from flexibilization of working conditions have been noticed. The similarities point to the growing global trend of precarious working relations in the creative sectors. Although presented on a different scale and in a different context, the restructuring or deregulation of labor markets has influenced the working and living conditions of the creative workforce in the selected countries. In the case of Slovenia, this can especially be seen through a decrease in monthly pay in relation to work performed and other economic activities, whereas in the Korean case important changes can be detected in the rising number of self-employed and occasional fluctuations in monthly pay.

The presence of specific precarization trends within the creative sectors in both societies may imply that the level of working and consequently living autonomy of creative workers is not increasing, but is even decreasing. Contrary to the expectations of creative workers that decided to enter the existing flexible employment relationship due to opportunities for increased working and living autonomy, the analysis shows that their position is gradually deteriorating. Under the present circumstances, the instability and pressures arising from the flexible employment relationship are putting creative workers closer to the position of "*mystified autonomy*" than "*relative autonomy*" (Ray, 2011, 175). Each employee is put in a position of "*relative autonomy*" i.e., is embedded in a specific working context that allows him a more-or-less critical approach when discussing or being active in relation to the employer and general socioeconomic system (Ray, 201, 175). By increasing instability and implementing other forms of informal pressures (i.e., structural constraints on creative workers), their ability to resist and attain more relative autonomy in relation to their employers is decreasing.

Under different circumstances and in a different period, a similar premise was already constructed by Berlin (1969), who discussed the acquisition of "negative freedom" in modern societies. Berlin was aware of increasing instabilities and pressures that lead to increasing control over citizens in modern societies. As such, he noticed that the levers of resistance needed to transform negative freedom into "*positive freedom*" are breaking and falling apart. Negative freedom includes negative rights, which allow citizens to remain free from state interference in some aspects of life (such as speech, thought, religion, military violence, etc.) but limits them in the acquisition of positive freedom, which represents the "*freedom to set the range of choices and the agenda of choice-making*" (Bauman, 2000, 51). In the context of this analysis, it may be concluded that flexibilization and deregulation of the labor market in Slovenia and South Korea generates specific elements of the negative type of freedom, which is expressed through precarization of working conditions, consequently leading to deterioration of working and living conditions for creative workers in the selected countries.

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6 One of the more radical responses of workers to this type of precarization (i.e., deregulation of the labor market and the sharp rise in non-temporary jobs) is the *haneul toojeng* 'sky protest' (Minns, 2012; Schober, 2013). Sky protests are held in high places such as industrial cranes, factory towers, transmission towers, bridges, chimneys, and other equipment. They usually include protester(s) that stay in these high places for several months or more.

## KREATIVNA PREKARNOST: FLEKSIBILIZACIJA DELOVNIH POGOJEV IN RAST PREKARNIH KREATIVNIH ZAPOSILITEV V SLOVENIJI IN JUŽNI KOREJI

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### POVZETEK

*Skladno z rastjo ustvarjalnega oz. kreativnega gospodarstva lahko opazimo tudi pojav naraščanja prekarne delo, ki je značilno zlasti za mlade posameznike v tovrstnih dejavnostih. Delovni proces zaposlenih v kreativnih poklicih je zelo prilagodljiv tako glede na način, kraj in plačilo dela. Ponavadi se odločajo za samozaposlitev in hitro premikajo od projekta do projekta, naloge do naloge, od enega do drugega delovnega mesta. Zaradi tovrstnih značilnosti, ki jih ne uvrščajo med tradicionalne tj. gospodarsko in socialno bolj stabilne oblike zaposlitve, jih je pogosto težko zajeti v analize delovnih procesov in razmer. Čeprav posamezniki, ki prakticirajo tovrstno obliko zaposlitve pogosto svoj status opisujejo kot neke vrste zaželen nenehno spreminjajoč se načina življenja, tak profil dela lahko opišemo tudi kot prekarne oblike samozaposlitve z visoko stopnjo negotovosti in nepredvidljivosti, ki vplivajo na ekonomsko stanje in psihično počutje posameznika. Njihovo delo na eni strani nudi svobodo, neodvisnost in ustvarjalni prostor, vendar vsebuje tudi nezaželene stranske učinke, ki jih najdemo v zmanjšanju socialne varnosti in povečanju stresa zaradi preobremenjenosti. Članek na podlagi statistik zaposlovanja in plač analizira nihanja in spremembe v socialnem statusu posameznih skupin ustvarjalnih delavcev v Sloveniji in Južni Koreji. Pri tem se predpostavlja, da intenzivna prestrukturiranja na področju zaposlovanja nakazujejo na naraščajoči globalni trend prekarne delovne razmerij v kreativnem sektorju.*

**Ključne besede:** prekarne delo, delavci v kreativnih dejavnostih, fleksibilno zaposlovanje, delovni pogoji, Slovenija, Južna Koreja

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