In March 2009 Kyiv city administration attempted to introduce official payments for many basic medical services, such as blood tests or vaccinations. This decision was widely discussed and criticized as unconstitutional (universal health care provision is guaranteed by the state free of charge to all Ukrainian citizens). But it also received support from many leading doctors and directors of hospitals who “spoke of the necessity of structural changes in the field and the impossibility and absurdity of free medicine” (Horetska, 2009). In fact, with transition to capitalism, many Ukrainian doctors began to speak in favor of privatization of health care, introduction of private medical insurance to lift the state’s “burden” in this field, or of remuneration of doctors according to market principles. On November 27, 2007 the official newspaper of Kyiv city administration Khreshchatyk organized a round table “Free medicine does not exist,” where doctors and administrators working in the field of health care said that “medicine should be managed like the economic field,” “doctors should be paid according to the amount of services they provide” or “we should
tell people the truth that when we introduce private health insurance it will not be free, it has to be paid for.” Head doctor of Kyiv maternity hospital No. 2 Tetiana Pykhnio confirmed that their hospital officially asks patients to make “charitable contributions” to receive “improved service and quality of care” (Horetska, 2009).

These doctors also encouraged thinking of health care in economic terms (as “services”) as a remedy to the unsatisfactory state of Ukrainian health care and of the low economic status of doctors and nurses (who are forced to leave Ukraine to work in Western Europe where they are much better paid). Although these doctors do not directly challenge the right to universal health care for all Ukrainian citizens that is written out in the constitution, they demand the privatization of specific health care “services” and an opportunity to receive higher wages in a competitive environment of paid health care services, which indirectly challenges universal health care provision by the state and deepens existing social inequalities. Doctors are not the only ones—Ukrainian schoolteachers offer private lessons in afterschool hours (income earned from such tutoring often exceeds official salary), thus providing better education for children from wealthier families. University professors offer “consultations” to political parties or marketing agencies and sometimes cooperate with private firms selling research papers to students (a student may request a paper on a particular topic to be written for him or her for a specific deadline and professors do this work for money). Their contradictory demands are based on professionalism of public sector workers in a competitive “free market” environment on the one hand and service for the public good on the other. More generally, they indicate the ambiguity of the status of professional public sector workers in the countries of the former “Socialist block.” By professional public sector workers I refer to skilled non-manual workers in the public sector, including lower rank civil servants, specialists in the fields of education, medical care and social protection, science and culture. They hold higher or specialist secondary education and come from the former Soviet stratum of “intelligentsia.” They are employed by the state to fulfill its obligations towards its citizens (education, health care and social protection, as well as access to works of art and culture) and are paid from the state’s budget.

Much has been said about the deteriorating state of public services in postsocialist countries in the 1990s. The structural changes (by which one usually means economic but also, more generally, objective material changes in other social institutions) in each of the Central and East European states can easily be tracked by analyzing both national and international statistics (the latter include reports by the UN, IMF, World Bank, etc.). At the other end of the spectrum there is also much research on individual or group psychological responses to societal transition (feelings of
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stress and dissatisfaction, coping strategies, “anomie” and difficulties in adaptation). However very little is said about the symbolic (discursive or ideological) transformations in the context of structural changes. In post-socialist societies symbolic transformations accompany structural ones, causing a great deal of social suffering for the people who struggle to affirm their social positions in a changing society but are unable to construct a satisfactory life narrative. The relationship between symbolic and structural changes refers to the classical sociological distinction between “culture” and “structure” (a Marxist distinction between “superstructure” and “base” or Foucault’s distinction between “discursive” and “material” structures). How do people react to economic changes in their countries, how do they talk about them, make sense of them and adjust their behavior accordingly? In the case of Ukrainian health care workers, quoted above: why do they demand privatization of health care, introduction of paid services or personal insurance—something they could not even think of some twenty years ago, when all health care was provided by the state? In what way are the interests of this privileged strata of health care workers similar to or different from other workers in the field of public service who provide more ambivalent accounts or actively oppose privatization?

**THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

This chapter deals with the process of symbolic transformations and identity construction of professional public sector workers in Ukraine during transition to capitalism. Burawoy and Verdery note that the so-called “transitologists” often forget that they are dealing with transitions: “When we speak of transition, we think of a process connecting the past to the future. What we discover, however, are theories of transition often committed to some pregiven future or rooted in an unyielding past” (Burawoy & Verdery, 1999, p. 4). In this chapter I propose to bring back into the picture the process of transition both “in things” and “in minds”—or, using Bourdieu’s terminology, both in the field of public service, and in agents’ systems of dispositions (habitus) within that field. I will use Bourdieu’s conceptual apparatus as an instrument to understand postsocialist transitions, showing the relational nature of social reality and overcoming the dichotomies of structure-agency, macro-micro, past-present.

Using Bourdieu’s terminology, one may say that the field of public service is a “field of struggles” and that these struggles are especially visible in a changing society. People occupying different positions in the field are differently predisposed towards the preservation or transformation of particular structures and practices. Post-Soviet change is therefore not only about the change in structures, but also about a change in habi-
tuses— in systems of durable dispositions that determine the way people perceive the world and act in it. In this paper I use a Bourdieusian approach to investigate symbolic transformations in post-Soviet societies.

I present findings from my research on the social suffering of professional public sector workers (hereafter abbreviated as “pps workers”) in Ukraine that I carried out for the MPhil degree at the University of Cambridge in 2005. My more specific question is: what new symbolic understandings arise in conditions of change and from whom, considering that people’s habituses were suited to earlier (“soviet”) structures. First I will present Bourdieu’s key concepts in relation to post-Soviet transformations and then introduce the results of my case study, followed by discussion and analysis.

**Navigating Through Symbolic Space**

Social reality exists, so to speak, twice, in things and in minds, in fields and in habitus, outside and inside of agents. And when habitus encounters a social world of which it is product, it is like a “fish in the water”: it does not feel the weight of the water, and it takes the world about itself for granted. (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 127)

The way we navigate through the social world depends on our positions (the point of reference—where we are looking from) and on our previous experiences (e.g., the process of socialization, through which we gain the necessary tools to make sense of it, learn certain patterns of behavior and thinking). Merleau-Ponty’s comparison of the social world with a football field is especially relevant here: a football player is also like a “fish in the water”—knowing and feeling on a prerational level how to act, taking into account his position in the field and his previous experience of the game. The rules of the game in a social field usually remain stable over fairly long periods of time which allows social participants to reproduce certain practices and pass on their symbolical meaning from generation to generation. Pierre Bourdieu picks up Merleau-Ponty’s comparison and introduces such terms as “field,” “habitus” and “practice” into his studies.

However, despite such a general tendency to stability and reproduction of symbolic practices, which have often been the focus of Bourdieu’s studies, change also occurs. A good example of such changes on both micro and macrosocial levels comes from post-Soviet East-European countries, where questions of social change are especially relevant: how does one system of symbols, cultural references and “things of value” push aside all the other ones and how do people accept (or resist) new rules of the
game, reconstructing their identities and investing into new values as the situation changes?

I believe that these questions may very well be answered using Bourdieu’s theory. First of all, it would be wrong to say that Bourdieu’s studies deal only with reproduction and stability—most of his early work on Algeria (“Uprooting,” “Work and Workers in Algeria,” etc.) and the on Béarn province (“Le bal des célibataires”) as well as his study of the academic field (“Homo Academicus”) deal specifically with situations of change, and his theoretical questions address issues of both reproduction and transformation. Responding to the criticisms of Bourdieu’s theory as “deterministic” and “failing to account for social change,” I will show, on the contrary, that Bourdieu does include the possibility of change in his theory, and that it is relevant and applicable to conditions of social change in Eastern Europe.

### Changing Habituses

Before proceeding further it is necessary to look at Bourdieu’s concepts of field and habitus in more detail. Bourdieu’s most cited definition of habitus sees it as “systems of durable dispositions, of structured structures that are predisposed to function as structuring structures.” His tautology is deliberate since it helps resolve an important dichotomy in social sciences—of material determinism of the Marxist model on the one hand, and of the independence and rational action of individuals or social groups on the other.

The notion of habitus accounts for the fact that social agents are neither particles of matter determined by external causes, nor little monads guided solely by internal reasons, executing a sort of perfectly rational internal program of action. Social agents are the product of history, of the history of the whole social field and of the accumulated experience of a path within the specific subfield. (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 136)

Because of his critical stance towards the currently dominant “rational choice” theories Bourdieu is often criticized for being “overly-deterministic” and failing to account for innovation and agency. The interviewer in “Introduction to reflexive sociology” asks in particular whether “the mediating concept of habitus really frees us from the “iron cage of structuralism” (p. 132) where “structures produce habitus, which determine practices, which reproduce structures” (p. 135). Bourdieu’s answer is the following:
Habitus is not the fate that some people read into it. Being the product of history, it is an open system of dispositions that is constantly subjected to experiences, and therefore constantly affected by them in a way that either reinforces or modifies its structures (p. 133).

People perceive the world based on their previous experiences, which causes a relative closure of the system (situations of “fit” between structures and habitus). But when there are radical changes in objective “material” structures (as in the case of the former Soviet Union) the “mental structures” of individuals are “out of place”: “There are also cases of discrepancy between habitus and field in which conduct remains unintelligible unless you bring into the picture habitus and its specific inertia, its hysteresis,”—writes Bourdieu (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 130). We see this “hysteresis” in research of displaced migrants or of conflicts between generations—where there are radical disjunctions between subjective perceptions and objective reality. These “disjuctions” are especially visible in postsocialist societies, as witnessed by the following observation:

We acknowledge that people’s responses to a situation may often appear as holdovers precisely because they employ a language and symbols adapted from previous orders. This does not mean their vision of the world has been so “corrupted” by the socialist experience as to make them unfit for other ways of life; it means only that action employs symbols and words that are not created de novo but develop using the forms already known, even if with new senses and to new ends. (Burawoy & Verdery, 1999, p. 2)

This quote describes very well my own experience while conducting interviews with professional public sector workers in Ukraine: what I saw were applications of “Soviet” language and symbols to new “capitalist” ends, with simultaneous attempts to adapt to structural changes and to resist them. Whether old symbolic references are seen as “holdovers” or new ones are seen as dangerous innovations, there is a great ambiguity and difficulties in trying to harmonize the field and the habitus, which results in positional suffering of these workers.

Public Service as a “Field of Struggles”

Bourdieu determines a field as a configuration of objective relations between positions, occupied by individuals or institutions. According to Bourdieu, the notion of a field comes from a fundamental principle that “the real is relational,” and that these relations are invisible structures of the field (rather than simple “interactions” between agents). A field is not static, but dynamic—similarly to a game, it is characterized by relation-
ships of power and “struggles” over control of specific forms of capital, that are dominant in that field. Another similarity with a game is the “investment” that the social actors make in the field, believing that “the game is worth playing”:

The structure of the field is a state of the power relations among the agents or institutions engaged in the struggle, or, to put it another way, a state of the distribution of the specific capital which has been accumulated in the course of previous struggle and which orients subsequent strategies. This structure, which governs the strategies aimed at transforming it, is itself always at stake. The struggles which take place within the field are about the monopoly of the legitimate violence (specific authority) which is characteristic of the field in question, which means, ultimately, the conservation or subversion of the structure of the distribution of the specific capital. (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 73)

Every particular “struggle” in the field of public service builds upon an “accumulation of previous struggles” that have shaped actual state of the field, but also “orients subsequent strategies” and shapes the field’s future state. We can see this tendency if we look at examples of recent struggles for or against changes in the Ukrainian public service. These changes happen partly as a result of the struggles of actors who occupy different positions within the field and are differently disposed towards the preservation or transformation of certain structures and practices. For example, one group campaigning for liberal transformations are top specialists (noted doctors, professors and scientists) who possess high levels of cultural capital but who only form a small percentage of public sector workers. They feel that, given more freedom, they will be able to “realize their potential” more fully and achieve both a higher social status in the public sector and a higher level of income (Symonchuk, 2003). The Soviet-inherited system of state bureaucracy, on the contrary, prefers to preserve the existing “rules of the game.” These professionals are most likely to benefit from high levels of social capital (given the connections they have and positions they occupy as a part of the bureaucratic apparatus). Finally, the largest subcategory, on which I focus in this paper—the mass of professional public sector workers—define themselves by the “heroic image” of service for the public good, since disinterestedness in profit allows them to achieve social status and respect in society.

But while the changes in the Ukrainian public service come from the unresolved conflicts in the earlier state of the field, they in turn shape the positions that actors end up occupying and their subsequent dispositions towards social change. For example, the privatization of certain educational and health-care institutions has led to widening inequalities among teachers and doctors with similar qualifications but working in different sectors.
Similarly, unequal regional development, especially along the rural-urban axis, means that workers in different communities have different opportunities to gain additional income or to change jobs. Therefore, the social suffering of some public sector workers can be explained through their marginal positions: in the public as opposed to the private sector, and in economically “depressed” regions as opposed to more successful ones.

**RESEARCH FINDINGS:**

**DISIDENTIFICATIONS AND IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION**

In order to show how a Bourdieusian framework can help us better understand the processes of symbolic transformations I will use my own study of the social suffering of public sector workers in Ukraine as an empirical example. The main method applied in my research was in-depth semi-structured interviewing. I interviewed 16 professional public sector workers coming from three communities (one urban—K, one semiurban—B and one rural—S) and of a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds. I have focused on these workers as a distinct category, based on their occupation (skilled nonmanual work), qualifications (higher or specialist secondary education) and sector of the economy (public service). However, these distinctions do not resolve an important contradiction that I believe to be at the heart of the ambiguities about professional public sector workers’ positioning in post-Soviet societies and a cause of their difficulties in self-identification during transition: where to focus in defining their status: on “professional” or “public sector worker?” The results of my study reveal positional suffering caused by the uncertainty of post-Soviet transformations and the role of pps workers in these processes.

“All They Think About is Money”: Dis-identifications From The “New Middle Classes”

My respondents invested into a form of “cultural superiority,” identifying themselves against the new (“entrepreneurial”) middle classes who, as Katia, a museum worker from Kyiv put it, “may be wealthy, but in terms of culture are much lower than us.” Nadia, a retired preschool teacher from Kyiv, stressed that “money does not bring happiness” and that she felt just as happy going to the forest, watching the sunset and reading books. She also mentioned that she taught the children “universal values, so that they grow kind and loving, hard-working, true patri-
ots of their Motherland’ and added: “I may be poor, but as the saying goes, poverty is not vice.”

Some people are in a hurry after material things. They want to have more and more. Cars, clothes, spending summer holidays at the Seychelles…. All these entrepreneurs, you know? All they think about is money! But does it bring happiness? (Nadia, K)

All these new things: mobile phones, fashionable clothes—I don’t need that. I know what’s really important in life: true friendship, constant self-improvement. This is why I kept my job, even when it was difficult, back in the early nineties, when we weren’t getting salaries for almost a year. Some of my colleagues quit, went to work in the private sector, as secretaries. But what kind of job is that? Answering phonecalls! My work is much more important! (Katia, K)

These two interviews show a rejection of the material values and a focus on “universal values,” “true friendship,” “constant self-improvement.” My respondents, who were very poor economically and for whom many of the modern material comforts (such as a car or a mobile phone) and luxuries (fashionable clothes, summer holidays at the Seychelles) were unattainable, rejected these “material things” as criteria to evaluate one’s position in society. Instead they looked for other criteria where they could be considered “higher up.” Culture and values were therefore used as distinguishing factors, with such features as self-improvement (reading books), dedication (“I kept my job even when it was difficult”), friendship, kindness, and hard work. The economically successful new middle classes were described as being culturally inferior (“I don’t need that. I know what’s really important in life” or “But does it bring happiness?”), and their work as less important (“But what kind of job is that?”). A lifestyle that was unattainable for my respondents also became undesirable. Here we can refer back to Bourdieu’s comment on the “lifestyle of necessity” where people “come to desire that, to which they are objectively destined” and “read the future that fits them, which is made for them and for which they are made” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 130).

“They Just Drink Vodka All The Time”: Dis-identifications From The “Working Classes”

The same criteria of “cultural superiority” and of the importance of one’s work led my respondents to dis-identify themselves from the working-classes. They stressed that they deserve higher wages than the manual workers, describing the latter as dirty, uneducated and abusing alcohol:
And you know how in the Soviet times some metallurgy worker or coal miner would be getting a salary five times higher than mine! And it still works like that! Oh, yes, its hard physical labour, but anyone can go down and dig some coal, and even unskilled workers, with no education, or even these alcoholics would get higher salaries! (Nina, B)

We are doing important work, you know? Only imagine what would happen if all of a sudden all doctors stopped working. If they had stopped operating, going out to dying patients, prescribing medicine? That would be a disaster! [...] This is why I think that doctors deserve high wages, much higher than some manual workers, they don’t do much, they just drink vodka all the time. (Valentyn, K) These uneducated ones, dirty alcoholics, just because they were the “working class,” yeah, this foundation of our “communist society,” right? And me, I have to sit quietly and be happy with my miserable salary [...] And I should tell you, I have a PhD, every other year I am attending courses to improve my qualification, I deserve more! (Mykola, B)

Materially my respondents were on the lowest positions in society and they felt that the efforts they have invested into education and “improving qualifications” did not pay off in terms of higher wages. However, they felt they need to refer to some group that would be even lower than themselves, if not materially, then culturally. In particular, they pointed out some “positive aspects of life”: high levels of cultural capital and service for the public good (“Imagine what would happen if all the doctors stopped operating?”). Svitlana, B, told a story of her neighbor, who was an alcoholic and often came to ask neighbors for food, because she was constantly running out of money. She saw in this “begging” a “lack of dignity.” She also mentioned that alcoholics stole pails and metal poles from her garden for recycling (“so they can then buy vodka”):

And they steal vegetables from our gardens ... why do they do that? Don’t they fear God? I would rather starve than steal, never-ever would I take what belongs to somebody else! We are working, making all these sacrifices ... (Svitlana, B)

Noteworthy here is Svitlana’s accent on “sacrifices.” Senett and Cobb (1972) in their study The hidden injuries of class also noted their respondents’ focus on making sacrifices to distinguish themselves both from the upper classes “who just have an easy living” and from “those on the dole.” Svitlana describes “sacrifice” through “preserving dignity” and “working hard” as opposed to “being lazy” and “stealing.” She tried to make sense of her suffering by opposing herself to the “bad people”: the “oligarchs” who “just stole our money” on the one hand, and the “alcoholics” who steal from her garden.
Skeggs’ (1997) research on working-class women taking courses in social care also shows how women, for whom middle class lifestyles were unattainable, invested into a “caring self” and “respectability.” They described the middle classes as “snobby,” “the posh ones,” “hoity-toity” or “stingy” and themselves as “kind” and “caring” (pp. 92-93). At the same time, by constructing a “caring self” they tried to be seen as different from the working classes, whom they described as “poor,” “rough,” “battering their kids” or “those without jobs” (p. 75). Dis-identifications of my respondents and investment into respectability as a form of cultural capital are strikingly similar. Skeggs concludes that “in every judgement of oneself a measurement is made against others” (p. 74). My respondents make negative judgements against others in order to affirm their own identities by investing in respectability, sacrifice, “universal values” and public service.

Discrepancy Between “Structure” and “Habitus”

Makeyev (1999, p. 217) claims in post-communist societies “former conventions, rules and modes of interaction are either partly deinstitutionalized already or not completely institutionalized yet.” People “lose control not only of processes that are happening in society as a whole, but also of reproduction of many in individual and group identities” (p. 216). On the one hand, the accent on the quality of social guarantees, and the glorification of the image of teachers, doctors, scientists and artists created a “heroic” image of a dedicated worker serving the public good. On the other hand, the accumulation of problems in the educational and health care systems, corruption and the questionable quality of service and of scientific and cultural output led to pp’s workers being ridiculed as corrupt, undedicated and unprofessional. The dichotomy between the “heroic” and “ridiculous” representations of workers (Stenning, 2005) illustrates well the underinstitutionalized “transitory” stage, in which a set of former dispositions does not correspond to new realities.

Using Bourdieu’s terminology, I describe this dichotomy as the discrepancy between “structures” and “habitus” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Such discrepancy results in ambivalence, dis-identification and, consequently, the social suffering of my respondents. The inconsistency in the interviews of my respondents “shows [the] psychological misery of men and women who are unable to construct a satisfactory life narrative” (Reid, 2002, p. 349). A good example of such inconsistency in determining an individual’s own position and role in society comes from Serhiy.
When I asked him whether he was giving private lessons to students, he interrupted my question and said:

Of course! If parents pay for private lessons, then why not? Of course, I give their children private lessons. There’s nothing wrong with that! It’s not a bribe, I’m working for this money, I’m teaching. If schools were private, it would be the same thing: parents paying for their children to get a good education. (Serhiy, B)

However, later on in the interview he tells the story of a gifted but poor student, who was very good at maths but who “had no chance of entering university, because his parents had no money, so the best he could hope for was the local agrarian college.” He describes how he tried unsuccessfully to encourage him to continue, but the student lost all interest in maths.

This is wrong. I think the state has to make sure that all talented children, no matter what family they come from, have an equal chance of developing their potential. […] Previously there were sports clubs, and summer camps and fun things to do, but now all these centres are only for those kids whose parents can pay, and poor parents get angry. […] I say I really wish these places were free, really. But parents don’t believe me. They think I get some profit… But this is simply not true!

In the second example he tries to resist the “ridiculous” image of a teacher as corrupt and interested only in personal profit (“They think I get some profit… But this is simply not true!”), and appeals to a “heroic” image of disinterestedness and service (“I tried to encourage him” and “I really wish these places were free, really!”). At the same time, the first extract suggests that he himself was contributing in a way to this image of the teacher thinking about personal gain and using the logic of the market to justify his actions.

In a similar way Sasha, a rural doctor, admitted that he took bribes from patients, but at the same time refused to present it as his own choice, preferring to see it as a necessity:

R: Yes, I ask for payments from patients, but that’s because I need to buy medicines myself, and also because I need to work extra hours without any extra pay, and I need to sustain my family too. […] I think if the state can’t do it, then hospitals should become private.

I: Do you think this would resolve problems? R: Yes, some of them… Although I don’t know, actually, whether it’s a good idea. Many people are poor. […] I had this one elderly man who was like that. He fought in the war, and didn’t have any legs. I just morally
couldn’t ask him for anything […] I feel embarrassed having to ask for a bribe. I’d rather not do it. I feel really bad, really. (Sasha, S)

Sasha concluded that “the state probably should keep a few free clinics” but that he “personally wouldn’t mind working in a private one.” Understanding the demand for their skills and their possession of high levels of symbolic capital made my respondents more disposed to refer to market principles and try to “adapt” to capitalist norms (“I personally wouldn’t mind working in a private clinic,” or “I work for this money. If schools were private this is how it would be”). However, an awareness of social injustice when encountering a ‘gifted but poor student’ or a “war veteran” returns them to the “heroic” image. They see in the adaptation to capitalist norms a possibility to improve their own positions. But at the same time they are not sure “whether it’s a good idea” and whether the losses will not be greater than the gains (which can also be described as the difference between considerations of personal and public good). Their own marginal positions make them more aware of the structural causes of their situation, but these processes that remain beyond their personal control also increase their suffering.

**Habitus as “a Set of Potentialities”**

Preferring the tactic of “adaptation” or “resistance” as a response to suffering, and placing the accent on professional qualities or on disinterestedness and service are not random but also reflect structural processes and each respondent’s position in the field. Bourdieu explains that “habitus reveals itself—remember that it consists of a system of dispositions, that is, of virtualities, potentialities, eventualities—only in reference to a definite situation.” His research with de Saint Martin (1982) on bishops provides an explanation of why my own respondents at times stressed on their “cultural superiority” while at others identified themselves with the other poor. In their research Bourdieu and de Saint Martin showed that under certain conditions—a specific time period, a specific province—bishops “would have asked the worshippers in their parishes to kiss their ring in a quasi-feudal aristocratic tradition, while under other conditions they become ‘red’ bishops, […] radical clergymen in the defense of the downtrodden” (as cited in Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 135). For my respondents the “conditions” were found on the one hand in their real opportunities to use their own symbolic capital to make additional income, and in their experiences of structural injustice on the other. A good example of these “specific conditions” comes from Halia, who lost her job in the local newspaper in the early 1990s and moved to work in the library:
Half of the people were unemployed here in our village... and then our newspaper also let many workers go, including me. [...] At the same time our librarian retired, and I just grabbed the job, seriously, just grabbed onto it with hands and feet... You know, I was already reaching my fifties. I didn't have the energy to hustle, to look for something, like the young people, but I didn't want to sit at home either. I wanted to do something useful for the people. (Halia, S)

Noteworthy here is that her investment in the “heroic” image of the pps worker (“I wanted to do something useful for the people”) is caused by a lack of alternatives (“Half of the people were unemployed,” “I just grabbed the job” or “I didn’t have the energy to hustle”). Later in the interview she admits that if she were younger, she would have left the village either to look for work in the regional centre, or if she were a man - in Moscow, at the construction site—“where all our men go now.”

I: But would you leave despite the importance of your work in the library?
R: Yes, I think I would. But that’s not even a question, because I can’t. This village doesn’t have a future. It’s true that here I’m treated with respect, but also with pity. The library, in truth, is lousy... New books haven’t been delivered for twenty years. All the old ones have been torn apart, especially those on the school curriculum. And now it’s not a proper library anymore. It has been moved to the school, and when the school closes down, they’ll move it to the regional centre.

Her interview shows feelings of hopelessness (“this village doesn’t have a future”) and of investing into disinterestedness and public service because other options were closed to her. Similarly, Hennadiy, a rural schoolteacher, also invested in the “heroic image.” He has been working at his school for 35 years and directs the local museum, founded by his grandfather:

When Bolsheviks destroyed the count’s palace and then the church, my grandpa ... quietly ... took everything that was valuable there—dishes, gold, statues ... and the icons and the chalices from the church ... He took it all, so it wouldn't disappear. Then, when things calmed down, he suggested opening a local museum at a party meeting. Our village is the only one in the region that has such a museum! And as long as I’m alive, I’ll take good care of it. Although, when I die, everything will probably be stolen and sold off... Even now, it’s been moved to the school, and the school will be closed down, because there are too few students.

Because of their dedication, Hennadiy and Halia are among the most respected people in the village, and following Bourdieu, their investment in “disinterestedness” has helped them achieve a high social status they
would not otherwise have, due to their low level of economic capital. At the same time, economic hardships and social change add to their heroic images a sense of hopelessness ("the school will be closed down"), strikingly similar to the doctor’s confession in Albert Camus’s novel *The Plague*: “I don’t know if what I am doing makes any sense, if anyone needs this. But I am a doctor and I have to do my work.”

My respondents in Kyiv often gave quite contrary answers. Tamara, a journalist, said that there is always demand for good specialists: “whether you’re a teacher, or a doctor, or an engineer, if you are doing your work professionally, then you’ll have money as well.” She gave examples from her own experience working at literary competitions, or as an editor—apart from her main job where her salary was also very low.

I: But not everyone has the same opportunities to make money outside of their job. For example, one of my other respondents, a librarian…

R: No, don’t say that. My friend is a librarian. At the University. So first of all she bought a photocopying machine to make some money, and she’s also renting out the reading room when the library closes—for some private English lessons I think. So those who wanted to adapt adapted quite well. (Tamara, K)

Tamara’s investment in the “adaptation discourse” is a result of the opportunities she has to use her own knowledge (in the field of literature) and skills (editing) for personal material gain. She believed in the presence of some “absolute space” (Watson, 2000, p. 200) where nothing apart from the individuals themselves prevents them from adapting and becoming empowered. But such logic fails to explain why Halia, who 20 years ago would have been in the same position as Tamara’s friend, does not buy a photocopying machine or rent out her library’s reading room for private lessons. Tamara’s explanation of “wanting to adapt” is insufficient, as most inequalities are created not by personal choice but by structural factors, and it is in response to these factors that different dispositions are formed. What it shows, though, is the common denial of structural privilege by the more successfulpps workers, who perceive their success in purely individualistic terms, in line with the neoliberal ideology. It also shows what is at stake in the field of public service and, more generally, in post-Soviet societies as such: a change in people’s “attitude” towards liberal values of individualism as a necessary element of successful transition to capitalism.
Sapiro (2006) argues that “intellectual professions” have always occupied a position between the state, entrepreneurship and industry. In countries with a more liberal tradition (United States or United Kingdom), the “bourgeois model” of independence and entrepreneurship became dominant, whereas in states with a more bureaucratic tradition (such as the French, the German, and the Habsburg empires) accent was placed on “intellectual service and public functions.” In the case of the USSR the only legitimate model for nonmanual labor was in public service, where “the well-educated and highly skilled had to find meaning in serving society, not accumulating wealth” (Leven, 2005, p. 449). On the contrary, now we are witnessing an attempt to reverse the dominant models.

The dissemination of neoliberal ideology in postcommunist Ukraine led to the individualized “adaptation discourse” (Ryabchuk, 2009) and also to changes in the field of public service. The World Bank (2005) describes the Ukrainian public service sector as “too large,” “overstaffed” and “unsustainable,” arguing for the need to diminish the extensive network of public services. These changes are similar to the transition from the welfare state (with its extensive system of social protection) to more neoliberal models in several countries of Western Europe. For example in France, Bourdieu et al. (1999, pp. 182-183) show how neoliberal writers associate “efficiency and modernity with private enterprise, and archaism and inefficiency with the public sector.” They identify “modernization” with the transfer into the private sector of the public services with the most profit potential and with eliminating or bringing into line subordinate staff in the public services, held responsible for every inefficiency and every “rigidity.”

Crouch (2004) notes that pps workers are encouraged by neoliberal commentators to focus on their professional skills and “to seek no means of social improvement other than for themselves, and their children obediently to climb the career ladders established by the business elites” (p. 60). Their wider concerns are not articulated, instead the focus is on the “inefficiency” of public services, “increasingly taken to mean that they want these privatized,” according to Crouch. Therefore, despite the fact that both social scientists and politicians have spoken a lot about the concerns of this social category, they have defined them as entirely at one with the market economy and adaptation to new realities. This is a good example of an attempt to change the habitus: within the framework of neoliberal ideology Ukrainian pps workers are also encouraged to position themselves as “professionals,” among the dominant classes, while dis-identifying themselves from public service and possible solidarity with the
dominated classes. However, as my findings show, any change in habitus is a very slow and painful process and causes social suffering for the people concerned.

In conclusion I would like to say, that one should not disregard the relation between the symbolic and structural transformations in post-soviet societies. It is important to ask where do different social representations, identifications (and dis-identifications) come from and what changes they may cause as a result. Bourdieu’s theory was found especially useful in my research of Ukrainian professional public service workers precisely for its ability to explain “symbolic transformations” in discourses and ideologies that shape these workers’ identities without forgetting about concomitant changes in objective structures in the field of public service.

**APPENDIX A: METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH PROCESS**

**Methodology**

Twelve semistructured interviews with professional public sector workers were conducted in December 2005 (with four more in April 2006) in three selected communities of different size and with different patterns of transition. The interviews took place either at homes of the respondents or at their places of work. Interviewees gave consent before the beginning of the interviews, they were asked permission to record the talk (all of the interviews were taped) and were advised that they do not have to answer the questions they may find uncomfortable, and can interrupt the interview at any time if they do not wish to continue. My knowledge of Ukrainian language was a significant advantage in carrying out and analyzing the results of the research.

I selected one rural, one urban and one small town community emblematic of the difficulties of the transition processes. The rural community (abbreviated as “S” in the findings section) is situated in the Sumy region, in North-Eastern Ukraine: a region that experienced highest levels of unemployment during the transition period (World Bank, 2005). It is emblematic of a community in decline: a sugar producing plant closed down in the early nineties and a collective farm that was growing sugar beets for the plant collapsed subsequently. Formerly a relatively large village of over 5,000 inhabitants with its own school, hospital, and even a local newspaper, it decreased in size to less than a thousand inhabitants. Many workers in the public sector lost their jobs (the hospital and the newspaper closed down) and teachers from the local school fear unemployment, since the number of students has fallen significantly and there
are discussions of closing the school as well. At the moment the community still has a library, several social clubs and a local ethnographic museum, but budget allocations to these services have decreased and they were all moved to the local school into one “socioeducational complex” to save on staff and maintenance expenses.

The small town community, Baryshivka (abbreviated as “B”), is situated in central Ukraine, 60 miles south-east of Kyiv. It is a town of 13,000 inhabitants with two schools, a kindergarten, a hospital, police and fire stations, a local newspaper, a city council building with its own statistical bureau, and a railway station. Most of town’s industry collapsed in the early 90s, although now some small-scale enterprises were created. Since the town is relatively close to Kyiv (less than two hours by train) almost a half of the working population commutes to Kyiv to work. Forced daily work migration and insecurity of employment (temporary, seasonal or low-skilled jobs) characterize this community. Professional public sector workers earn salaries that are much lower than even some of the unskilled workers who commute to Kyiv, and to keep up a decent lifestyle have to engage in petty commerce, work on the land or adopt other survival strategies. This community is emblematic of “hustling,” where people try to keep up a decent standard of living.

And finally, Kyiv (abbreviated as “K”)—the capital of Ukraine, has been experiencing economic growth and has the lowest unemployment rate of less than three per cent (World Bank 2005). At the same time, Kyiv is exemplary of widening inequalities as the gap between the richest and the poorest of its inhabitants is very visible. Public sector workers, financed from the state budget, earn significantly less than workers in the dynamic private sector. Many possibilities offered for “adaptation” to new conditions by employment in the private sector leads to social suffering of professional public sector workers who are caught between their dedication to work and external pressures to “adapt” in order to make higher incomes.

Prior contacts and preliminary knowledge of communities I went to enhanced my understanding of the socioeconomic spaces where respondents came from, and helped build a less-distanced, nonhierarchical and informal relationship between them and myself as an interviewer. I have selected respondents through personal contact using “snowballing” technique. A common concern with nonprobability sampling is that some voices and points of view may not be taken into account (May, 2001, p. 132). However, random sampling was not practical in my case, because of time and resource constraints. Furthermore, even in the case of non-representative sampling or case-studies it is still possible to develop more general theoretical statements about regularities in social structure and processes (Becker, 1970). I addressed concerns with how far the data can be generalized through careful selection of respondents from different
professions within the category of PPS workers, of different socioeconomic backgrounds and of a variety of lifestyles. (For a list of respondents' age, gender, profession and income see Appendix B.) I asked two filter questions before beginning the interviews: whether a person has been working in the public sector both before and after the fall of the Soviet Union (although I did interview those respondents who either retired or changed jobs in the last five years), and whether a person experienced any suffering or discomforts related to transformations.

Research Process

1. September 2005: I have located secondary sources of data and visited communities selected for research (in order to get a preliminary idea of the social spaces that the respondents come from and to make initial contact and arrangements for interviews to be carried out at a later stage).
2. October-November 2005: I have reviewed relevant literature and secondary data from studies of poverty and social suffering in post-communist societies, while identifying an “under researched” area in existing studies, which turned out to be a the causes social suffering of PPS workers in postcommunist Ukraine.
3. December 2005-January 2006: I have collected primary data in the form of semi-structured in-depth interviews.
4. January-March 2006: I have transcribed the interviews and analyzed the relationship between social suffering of “mass intelligentsia” and the changing social structure. At this stage original hypothesis was modified according to the actual findings of my research, and second stage of interviewing followed in April 2006 for respondent validation (Silverman, 2001, p. 233)
5. March-May 2005: I have put together and analyzed the findings of my research in relationship to more general social processes taking place in postcommunist Ukraine, such as changing social structure and widening inequalities, changes in the field of public service, adaptation and resistance to postcommunist transformations.
Appendix B: Information on the Respondents
(All Names Have Been Changed)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Profession</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Income</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Urban community</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Katia: Museum worker</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>560</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Natalia: Accountant, former engineer and lecturer</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>1,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Nadia: Retired pre-school teacher</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>480</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Tamara: Journalist, editor</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Olena: University professor (English language)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>1,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Valentyn: Doctor (paediatrics)</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>690</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small town community</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Serhiy: Secondary school teacher (Physics, Maths)</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>560</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Svitlana: Secondary school teacher (Ukrainian language)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>470</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Liuba: Self-employed, former elementary school teacher</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Nina: Retired nurse</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>440</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Vera: Statistician</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>480</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Mykola: Journalist of a local newspaper</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>550</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural community</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Oksana: Secondary school teacher (Ukrainian literature)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>520</td>
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<tr>
<td>15. Halia: Librarian</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>420</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Sasha: Doctor (general practitioner)</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>540</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

REFERENCES


