



*Work and Non-Work. 51st ITH Conference.* International Conference of Labour and Social History (ITH); IGK Work and Human Life Cycle in Global History (re:work), 17.09.2015—19.09.2015.

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## **Work and Non-Work. 51st ITH Conference**

The 51st ITH Conference organised by the ITH and its member institute, the IGK Work and Human Life Cycle in Global History (re: work), aimed to reflect critically on the concept of work and the long-standing construction of work as wage labour and gainful employment from an interdisciplinary and intersectional perspective. Taking a global approach to the history and present of labour allows for the investigation of the so-called grey zones between work and activities defined as non-work, including unacknowledged, unpaid or illegal work, that were activities embedded in the development of modern economies and a normative, mainly wage-based notion of work. The conference paid special attention to the varying forms of differentiation and relationship between work and non-work throughout history, its influence on socio-political decision-making and the lives of (non)working people.

In her conference opening remarks SUSAN ZIMMERMANN, ITH President, identified global labour history as a scientific background to efforts aimed at finding alternative solutions towards a more egalitarian and less violent world order. This had special salience in the present refugee crisis that was signaling the larger crisis of global capitalism. ANDREAS ECKERT, Director of re:work, continued this line of thinking by underlining the current massive transformations in the definition of work as well as the importance of policies and practices around the fuzzy demarcation lines between(re)invented definitions of work and crime, work and leisure, paid and unpaid work, work outside and inside households, male

and female areas of work, etc.

The key note lecture of ILSE LENZ (Bochum) examined boundary drawings between work, understood in the sense of a standard wage earning activity, and all other forms of activities considered not areal work in the postcolonial world.

Panel 1 investigated the varying understandings of what constituted and constitutes areal work in different time and place. As JÄRGEN KOCKA (Berlin) presented, different meanings of this concept could also exist parallel to each other in a given location and time phase. ALISSA KLOTS (New Brunswick / Perm) explored the contradictory state approaches to domestic service in the Soviet Union between the Revolution of 1917 and World War II. Through a comparative case study between similar shop floor contexts in the shipbuilding and dockers milieu of Trieste, Koper and Rijeka across the Cold War divide between Italy and Yugoslavia, SABINE RUTAR (Regensburg) investigated both theoretical and practical aspects of a new strike culture after World War II. The closing paper in this session given by ADĀLA SOURALOVĀ (Brno), provided an interesting alternative to the meaning of work in the 21st century. SouralovĀ presented the case of Czech nannies working for Vietnamese families in today's Czech Republic, and showed that due to the low payments they received for their work and the emotional ties they developed to the children, they were keen to define their activity as non-work and wanted to avoid being commodified.

Panel 2 addressed the categorization and governance of work and non-work. Two papers drew attention to the critical role of the state in this process. The joint presentation of LÅA RENARD (Potsdam / Grenoble) and THERESA WOBBE (Potsdam) underlined the classifying and controlling power of statistics. The different framings of family work in the German national censuses at the turn of the 19th and 20th century on the one hand, and by the labour force concept of the International Labour Organization (ILO) following World War II on the other, showed the processes by which the establishment of statistical categories made certain groups of people visible or invisible as well as highlighted the on-going and shifting boundary-making between what was to be understood as work and non-work. Focusing on the construction of unemployment in interwar Austria, IRINA VANA (Vienna) analysed how the establishment of public labour offices as well as people without work themselves contributed to the making and normalization of categories of work and non-work. The two other papers of the panel provided insight into production and local market relationships and the entangled nature of images and values of work and non-work in the history of industrialisation from a global perspective. The study of JÅRGEN SCHMIDT (Berlin) gave a variety of examples of how the Western / European understanding of work represented by German colonisers was challenged by colonial perspectives in Samoa in the second half of the 19th and the first two decades of the 20th century. ELISE VAN NEDERVEEN MEERKERK (Wageningen) used a case study of colonial Java to challenge the well-established theory of de-industrialization that contends that local industry was hindered as a result of colonialism.

The contributors to Panel 3 that was organized around the theme of transgressive practices at work investigated the grey zones around the boundaries constructed between work and non-work and the limits of the categories 'work' and 'non-work' for historical research. Analysing disciplinary case files on civil servants' work performance as well as their self-perception regarding work and work avoidance, THERESE GARSTENAUER (Vienna) inquired into the concept of underperformance at work in Austria in the first half of the 20th century. STEFANO PETRUNGARO (Regensburg) examining the changing construction of sex work/prostitution from being accepted and managed by state authorities as a job to its complete criminalisation in Yugoslavia between 1918 and 1941, highlighted the blurred division lines between socially and legally rec-

ognized work, non-work, and criminal activity. PETE PESONEN (Helsinki) in turn focused on a grey area in the field of industrial work by discussing the case of non-commercial work performed by workers for their own personal benefit at Finnish factories between the early and mid-20th century. IVAN RAJKOVIÅ (London) addressed the unstable division of work and 'mock work' through the social and moral dynamics caused by the 'end of work' in the context of the slowdown of production in a Serbian car factory in the 1990s and 2000s. Finally, ANDREW URBAN (New Brunswick) examined the so-called 'servant question' in the United States between 1850 and 1870, understood at the time as a conflict between American capital and foreign labour, that manifested, among others, in the frequent refusal of domestics to take positions they defined as bad.

Panel 4 focused on the 'invention and remoulding of work' from the perspective of what JOSEF EHMER (Vienna) in his comments described using the concepts of the 'moral economy', after E.P. Thompson, and 'performance'. ELEONORA CANEPARI (Marseille) presented the world of non-domestic services in early modern Rome, which were low-level but economically necessary tasks, but which often had been considered 'non-work', because persons carrying out such services were non-trained and not part of a guild. KATHRIN MOELLER (Halle-Wittenberg) discussed the evolution of the idea of performance in German intellectual discourses in the early Enlightenment period. Two following presentations engaged with the meanings of work in the state socialist contexts of the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia. ALEXANDRA OBERLÅNDER (Bremen) contrasted the official representation and the self-reflection of former *shabashniki*, intellectuals in Soviet society, who performed physical work in their summer vacation. AMY WATSON (Glasgow) analysed the lived experiences of employed and unemployed young Czech people concerning work. She problematised the insufficient consideration given to the co-existence of neoliberal discourses of work with discourses stemming from other political rationalities, such as communism in today's post-socialist contexts. In closing, MILENA KREMAKOVA (Warwick) presented the case of academic professionals, such as mathematicians, and raised the question, who gets to define what constitutes scientific work and knowledge at the contemporary, tension-loaded intersection of the global scientific labour market, driven by a neoliberal culture of production, and the professional demands of scientific labour.

The last panel of the conference was devoted to

the conceptualisation of work and non-work among Roma/Gypsy communities. The four papers represented an anthropological approach to analysing the categorisation of Roma by the majority society and their self-representation on the work-non-work continuum. In his introductory remarks, historian GERHARD BAUMGARTNER (Vienna) emphasised that in the thousand years presence of Roma on the European continent, it was only in the 19th century that discourses about their association with non-work appeared. JAN GRILL (Manchester) discussed the adverse effects of work activation projects, which target the long-term unemployed by workfare rather than welfare programs, on the Roma and non-Roma poor as well as local programme implementers in contemporary Slovakia. Two papers focused on the practice of begging, stereotypically associated with the ethic of non-production among Roma. CĂTĂLINA TESĂR (Bucharest) aiming to reverse this non-Roma work ethic claimed that begging constituted a form of productive activity among Romanian Cortorari Gypsies. ELISABETH TAUBER (Bolzano) continued with the thematisation of female begging and through that the understanding of the concept of work among the Sinti in the Austrian and Italian Alps. The session's last paper by MARTIN FOTTA (Kent) analysed informal money-lending practices among the Calon of Bahia in Brazil in order to reflect on the meaning of their self-proclaimed statement that 'Gypsies do not work' but 'make deals' instead.

The concluding debate of the conference opened with the summary of SIGRID WADAUER (Vienna) of the various ways the notions of work and non-work were addressed in the panel discussions. She underlined that while work and non-work as general concepts could serve as good starting points for further research, they were also problematic, because of their lack of specificity. The ensuing comments and remarks by conference participants oriented around two larger themes: the meaning of work as a category of analysis and practice, and the category of 'Roma' in general. Concerning the concept of work, an agreement was reached about the necessity of paying attention to local differences, and accounting for different meanings of work arising out of historically and geographically different practices, including non-capitalist contexts, as a way to avoid generalisation. At the same time, using work as a theoretical concept was important in keeping the politically critical edge of research. In turn, a wish that a future conference would focus on irregular forms of work and 'atypical' labour relationships, being the mainstream in the third

world, and increasingly widespread in countries with more advanced economies, was also voiced. In addressing the topic of Roma comments touched upon the question to what extent models presented at the conference on the perception of work among Roma could be generalised. It was important to differentiate among Roma and, as Gerhard Baumgartner added, recognise that most research focused on the small percentage of self-identifying Roma, who had not assimilated into mainstream society, thereby contributing to the reinforcement of the othering of Roma in society.

In approaching the history of labour from a global, comparative perspective the conference contributed significantly to integrating previously marginalized subjects and areas in and moving discussion on the world of labour beyond the history of the industrial working classes, a shift that has been taking place in labour history since the 1990s. The panels combined an interesting variety of historical, sociological and anthropological perspectives and addressed critically the constructions of the European East-West and the global North and South divide. In this light, while it was an important contribution of the conference that a specific panel addressed the relationship between constructions of work/non-work and the concept of 'the Gypsy', this subject could have nevertheless been more integrated to the discussion of the conference sub-themes. Overall, the variety of perspectives and cross-disciplinary approaches participants represented in their investigation of the topic of work and non-work ensured a lively discussion throughout the conference.

### **Conference Overview:**

Conference Opening

*Keynote Lecture*

Ilse Lenz (Ruhr University Bochum): Boundary Drawings and Dominations: Non/Work in Postcolonial Worlds

*Panel I: The Making of Real Work?*

Jürgen Kocka (re:work, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin): The Construction of 'Work' and 'Worker' in the Emerging Social Democratic Labour Movement in Germany 1840s-1870s

Alissa Klots (Rutgers University, New Brunswick / Perm State University): How Non-Work Becomes Work: Paid Domestic Labour and the Construction of the Soviet Working Class, 1917-1941

Sabine Rutar (Institute for East and Southeast European Studies, Regensburg): Constructing the Working People: Shipbuilders and Dockers Milieus on Both Sides of the Italo-Yugoslav Border During the Cold War

Adla Souralov (Masaryk University, Brno): Boundary Work in Paid Caregiving: How Do Nannies Understand their Roles and Identities of Care Workers?

Tibor Valuch (University of Debrecen): Chair and comment

*Panel II: Categorising and Governing Work and Non-Work*

La Renard and Theresa Wobbe (University of Potsdam; University of Grenoble / University of Potsdam): Working with Family: The Statistical Recording of Family Workers, 1882-2010

Jrgen Schmidt (re:work, Humboldt-Universitt zu Berlin): Work and Non-Work in the "Paradise of the South Seas": Samoa, ca. 1860-1920

Irina Vana (University of Vienna): Producing Mass Unemployment, Austria 1918-1938

Elise van Nederveen Meerkerk (Wageningen University): Forgotten Labour. Indigenous Textile Production in Java under Dutch Colonial Rule, ca. 1830-1940

Andreas Eckert (re:work, Humboldt-Universitt zu Berlin): Chair and comment

*Panel III: Transgressive Practices at Work*

Therese Garstenauer (University of Vienna): Under Suspicion of Underperforming? Austrian Civil Servants in the First Half of the 20th Century

Stefano Petrunaro (Institute for East and Southeast European Studies, Regensburg): Sex Work in Yugoslavia, 1918-1941

Pete Pesonen (Finnish Labour Archives, Helsinki): Non-Commercial Work: Working in the Grey Area

Ivan Rajkovi (University College London): Make Do and Mock-Labour: Ambiguous Distinctions of Work and Non-Work in a Slowdown of Production in Serbia

Andrew Urban (Rutgers University, New Brunswick): "Biddy", Emancipation, and the Crisis of Free Labour: Engineering Servility in the United States North, 1850-1870

Sigrid Wadauer (University of Vienna): Chair and

comment

*Panel IV: Inventing and Remoulding Work*

Eleonora Canepari (Aix-Marseille University): Working as Factotum. Non-Domestic Services and the Urban Economy, XVIIth-XVIIIth Century Rome

Katrin Moeller (Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg): Honour by Performance. Interpretations of a Performance-Based Society at the Turn of the 18th/19th Centuries

Alexandra Oberlnder (Research Center for East European Studies, Bremen): "In the Summertime": Working in the Soviet Far East

Amy Watson (University of Glasgow): Young Czechs Talking about (Un)Employment: Can Theories of Neoliberalism Understand Contemporary Meanings of Work in "Post-Socialist" Settings?

Milena Kremakova (University of Warwick): Do Mathematicians Work? Science, Marketisation and the Changing Meanings of Scientific Labour in Contemporary British and German Academia

Josef Ehmer (University of Vienna): Chair and comment

*Panel V: Conceptualising Work and Non-Work among Roma/Gypsies Communities*

Jan Grill (University of Manchester): Ambiguities of Work: (Re-)Learning to Labour, Precariousness and Making of (In-)Active Citizens in the Case of Slovak Roma

Ctlina Tejar (National Museum of the Romanian Peasant, Bucharest): Begging as Work among Romanian Cortorari Gypsies

Elisabeth Tauber (Free University of Bozen-Bolzano): I Have To Do "Understanding "Work" from a Sinti-Centric Perspective

Martin Fotta (University of Kent): Householding Against Work: Informal Moneylending and Relatedness among Calon of Bahia

Gerhard Baumgartner (Documentation Centre of Austrian Resistance/DAW, Vienna): Chair and comment

*Concluding Debate*

Sigrid Wadauer (University of Vienna): Chair and comment

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