



International Conference of Labour and Social History

Internationale Tagung der HistorikerInnen der Arbeiter- und anderer sozialer Bewegungen
Conférence internationale d'histoire ouvrière et sociale



PROGRAMME (12.9.2016)

“Commodity Chains and Labour Relations”

15 – 17 September 2016

Museum Arbeitswelt, Wehrgrabengasse 7, A-4400 Steyr, Austria

Conference Languages: English – German

52nd ITH Conference, organized by the International Conference of Labour and Social History (ITH), kindly supported by the Chamber of Labour of Upper Austria, the Museum Arbeitswelt Steyr, the Friedrich Ebert Foundation and the Institute for the History of Trade Unions and Chambers of Labour, Chamber of Labour of Vienna.

Preparatory Group

Ulbe Bosma (International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam), **Karin Fischer** (Johannes Kepler University Linz), **Erich Landsteiner** (University of Vienna), **Jürgen Kocka** (Berlin Social Science Center/WZB), **Andrea Komlosy** (University of Vienna), **Lukas Neissl** (ITH, Vienna), **Susan Zimmermann** (ITH, Vienna)

Objectives

Due to the increasing linkage and hierarchical connection of global production sites, the concept of global commodity chains has become indispensable for the investigation of production at a global scale. It is based on the observation that commodity production often – and increasingly since the 1970s – exceeds the boundaries of production sites in one country and that specific production processes are being outsourced to subsidiary or subcontracting companies in other countries and, thus, divided among several locations with different legal, wage, social and fiscal systems. Their combination can save costs. In producing raw materials and food, primary producers have also been integrated into transnational commodity chains.

Approaches and concepts in the historical and contemporary commodity chain research differ depending on whether the unequal division of labour in the world-system, the organisation of business networks or the possibility of upgrading companies, regions or states are emphasized. A global historical perspective demonstrates that transnational supply chains – outsourcing and splitting production processes to different locations – are historically by no means new phenomena: Particularly in the textile and metal sector export production has been characterized by transnational commodity chains at least since the “long 16th century”. Even before then, interregional trade existed that occasionally took the shape of commodity chains. In the long term, periods of local centeredness and transregional combination of locations seem to have been alternating.

The ideal-typical distinction between “producer-driven” and “buyer-driven commodity chains” is also relevant for the analysis of power relations from a historical perspective. Whereas large, vertically integrated and multinational industrial enterprises control the usually capital- and technology-intensive production process (e.g. in the automotive industry) in the first case, it is commercial companies and trademark proprietors organising decentralised production networks between regions and beyond national borders in the second case (production of food and consumer goods). Control and governance of these arrangements have become important research areas.

So far, research has given little attention to the specific relations of production, the organisation of the work process within the particular links of a chain and the exchange ratios between them. Therefore, commodity chain research frequently concludes in some kind of “commodity fetishism”. Work – although the basis of

production in every involved location – is being neglected as a research subject or merely addressed as a cost factor, without taking interest in the workers, the work processes and the working conditions.

The conference aims to empirically investigate labour relations in commodity chains in their diversity and combination and, thus, also aims to contribute to the conceptual debate on work and labour, value, the functioning of capitalism and the agency or lack of power of directly and indirectly involved producers. On the one hand, it is of central interest to what extent and how working conditions, labour relations and work experiences in particular locations have influenced the formation of product chains. On the other hand, the impact of the involvement in such product chains on labour relations and workers in the particular locations will be explored.

The conference focuses on the role of work and labour in the commodity chain:

- The focus is on the mobilisation of labour force for work within the commodity chains and their incorporation and involvement in commodity chains, the (individual and organised) actions of workers and the question how the willingness for integration, refusal and social struggles impact the specific composition and development of different commodity chains.
- Special attention will be given to the combination of different labour relations and the effects of such combinations on the companies and workers located at different positions in the production chain, including the linkage of workers operative within the commodity chains with their family members performing unpaid work in their respective households. This requires a broad concept of work including regulated and informal, paid and unpaid, free and unfree work.

The city of Steyr – the historic hub of a commodity chain in the metal sector – serves as an exemplary venue. Since the early modern period this chain has extended from the Styrian Erzberg to the processing regions of the Eisenwurzen – that were supplied with food (products) from the Alpine foothills – to the sites of highly specialised further processing to weapons and tools in the world economy at that time. In the second half of the 19th century this commodity chain was replaced by centralised metal factories in Steyr that merged all processing steps in their factory halls. While the old factories in the historical Wehrgraben district have been museumized, the city still hosts important companies of the metal, automotive and arms industry that nowadays are however integrated into global commodity chains.

Thursday, 15 September 2016

Registration of participants at the venue

12.00 – 14.00 Meeting of the ITH Board and the International Scientific Committee

14.00 – 14.30 Break

14.30 – 16.30 General Assembly of the ITH

17.00 – 17.30 **Conference Opening:**

Susan Zimmermann, ITH President

Katrin Auer, Managing Director of the Museum Arbeitswelt Steyr

Franz Molterer, Deputy Director of the Chamber of Labour of Upper Austria

17.30 – 19.00 **Keynote Lecture:**

Andrea Komlosy (University of Vienna): ***Chains of Labour: Connecting Labour History and the Commodity Chain Paradigm***

19.00 – 20.00 **Welcome Reception**

20.00 – 21.00 Award of the **René Kuczynski Prize 2016** for outstanding publications in the field of social and economic history to **Klemens Kaps** for his book „*Ungleiche Entwicklung in Zentraleuropa: Galizien zwischen überregionaler Verflechtung und imperialer Politik (1772–1914)*“ (Wien/Köln: Böhlau Verlag 2015)

Laudation: Tomasz Kargol (Jagiellonian University, Kraków)

Friday, 16 September 2016

Registration of participants at the venue

8.30 – 10.00

Panel I: Primary Production

Chair and comment: Ulbe Bosma (International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam)

- Rolf Bauer (University of Vienna): *The Peasant Production of Opium in 19th Century India*
- Uwe Spiekermann (University of Göttingen): *Labour Shortage as Task and Challenge: The Hawaiian and Californian Sugar Industry in the Late 19th Century*
- Ernst Langthaler (Johannes Kepler University Linz): *Global Soy Commodity Chains and Regional Agricultural Labour Relations in the 20th Century: Northeast China, USA and Brazil in Comparison*

10.00 – 10.30

Coffee Break

10.30 – 12.00

Panel II: Metal and Mining

Chair and comment: Ulbe Bosma (International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam)

- Erich Landsteiner (University of Vienna): *The Relations of Production in the Steel Production of the Innerberg District (Upper Austria/Styria) in the 16th Century – an Analysis in the Light of the Commodity Chain Approach*
- Chris Evans (University of South Wales), Linn Holmberg (Uppsala University), Måns Jansson (Uppsala University), Göran Rydén (Uppsala University): *What was Steel in the Eighteenth Century? Commodity Chains and Knowledge Flows in Northern Europe*
- Miroslav Lacko (Slovak Society of Social and Economic History, Limbach): *Problems of Proto-Industrial Logistics in the Distribution of East-Central European Copper Production on the Global Markets of the 18th Century*

12.30 – 15.45

Guided tour to BMW Steyr Plant

16.00 – 17.15

Workshop

with **Andreas Brich** (Chairman of the works council at the BMW Motoren GmbH) and **Peter Schissler** (Federal Secretary for Education and International Affairs of the trade union PRO-GE and chairmen of weltumspannend arbeiten)

17.15 – 19.15

Panel III: Long-term and Transregional Perspectives

Chair and comment: David Mayer (ITH, Vienna)

- Heide Gerstenberger (University of Bremen): *On the Political Economy of Capitalist Labour Relations in the Era of Globalization*
- Christof Jeggle (Bamberg): *Product Lines and Production Markets: Analysing Labour Relations in Pre-Industrial Production and Distribution*
- Klemens Kaps (University of Vienna): *Commodity Chains and Labour Relations in a Peripheral Region: A Longue Durée Perspective on Habsburg Galicia, 1772-1918*
- Zdeněk Nebřenský (Masaryk Institute and Archive of the Czech Academy of Sciences, Prague): *Commodity Chains and Transformation of Industrial Space: The Case of Cotton Mills in the Bohemian Lands during the Gründerzeit*

Saturday, 17 September 2016

10.00 – 12.00

Panel IV: Flows of Production and Upgrading Strategies

Chair and comment: Karin Fischer (Johannes Kepler University Linz)

- Santosh Hasnu (University of Delhi): *Labour Circulation through Transport Systems*
- Franziska Ollendorf (University of Giessen / Université de Toulouse-Jean Jaurès): *Governing through CSR – Linking Institutional Transformation and Private Governance in the Cocoa Value Chain*
- Christin Bernhold (University of Zurich): *Argentinean Agro-Industrial Chains, Upgrading, and Uneven Development: Incorporating Marxian Theory of Value into Chain Research*
- Johanna Sittel (University of Jena): *(Re)Production of Informal Work in the Automotive Value Chain in Argentina*

12.00 – 13.30

Lunch

13.30 – 15.00

Panel V: Workers' Agency and Labour Struggles

Chair and comment: Jörg Nowak (City University of Hong Kong)

- Marek Čaněk (Multicultural Centre Prague), Devi Sacchetto (University of Padua), Rutvica Andrijasevic (University of Bristol): *From Socialist to Multinational Electronics Production: The Case of Foxconn in Eastern Europe*
- Michaela Douth (University of Bonn): *The Movement of Cambodian Garment Workers: Labour Agency Potential in the Global Garment Production Network*
- Oliver Pye (Bonn University): *Global Production Networks and Transnational Organising in the Palm Oil Industry*

15.00 – 15.30

Coffee break

15.30 – 16.30

Concluding Debate

Chair: Goran Musić (Centre for Southeast European Studies, University of Graz)

17.30 – 19.00

Guided historical tours in Steyr