

Conference Report of the 51st ITH Conference: "Work and Non-Work"

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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, ITH President **Susan Zimmermann** identified global labour history as a scientific background to efforts aimed at finding alternative solutions towards a more egalitarian and less violent world order. Such efforts need to take into consideration forms of labour that had been labelled marginal to Cold War labour history, developing thereby integrative perspectives and forms of thinking about the world of labour worldwide. This had special salience in the present refugee crisis that was signalling 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. Global labour history furthermore sheds light on the temporally and spatially defined differences among the meanings of work, including the shifting forms and labelling of work and non-work across the life course.

Ilse Lenz's key note lecture (Ruhr University, Bochum) examined boundary drawings between work, understood in the sense of a standard wage earning activity, and all other forms of activities considered not "real work" in the postcolonial world. Taking a reverse focus by recognising the wide horizon of work as her starting point, Lenz pointed to multiple development paths in the chain of production and reproduction globally in their intersections with social differentiation along socio-economic status, gender and race/ethnicity. In her comprehensive overview, she also underlined the erosion of subsistence production that used to function as a survival tool in the 19th century world of multiple occupations, resulting in an increase in the precariousness of living in the 20th century.

Panel 1 investigated the varying understandings of what constituted and constitutes "real work" in different time and place. As **Jürgen Kocka** (Humboldt University, Berlin and re:work) presented, different meanings of this concept could also exist parallel to each other in a given location and time phase. The three definitions of work and the worker that competed with each other in the German labour movement of the 19th century all contributed to the formation of the movement by negotiating different boundaries of

inclusion and exclusion. **Alissa Klots** (Rutgers University and Perm State University, Russia) explored the contradictory state approaches to domestic service in the Soviet Union between the Revolution of 1917 and World War II. As a result of their gendered visions of labour and society, the Bolsheviks were unable to resolve the tension between wishing to abolish "white slavery" and legitimating private domestic service as an important part of the Soviet economy. Through a comparative case study between similar shop floor contexts in the shipbuilding and dockers' milieus of Trieste, Koper and Rijeka across the Cold War divide between Italy and Yugoslavia, **Sabine Rutar** (Institute for East and Southeast European Studies, Regensburg) investigated both theoretical and practical aspects of a new strike culture after World War II. While the concerns about living standard, work place security, malpractices, etc. motivating protests and riots by workers had been similar in the above industrial centres, workers' demands and "managers" behaviour were influenced by two contrasting socio-economic and ideological settings. The closing paper in this session given by **Adéla Suralová** (Masaryk University, Brno), provided an interesting alternative to the meaning of work in the 21st century. Suralová 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. This phenomenon contrasted with the reduction of the meaning of work to wage work as differentiated from "non-work" in the long 20th century.

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 **Léa Renard** (University of Potsdam and University of Grenoble) and **Theresa Wobbe** (University of 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 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** (University of 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. Relying on autobiographical accounts of people without work, Vana pointed out that the normalization of unemployment contributed both to the normalization of certain forms of work and the production of new practices and hierarchies of work and livelihoods. 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. **Jürgen Schmidt's** study (Humboldt University, 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 University) 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. Pointing to the narrow focus of this position on capital-intensive industrialisation and male factory labour force, she drew attention instead to household and gendered labour relations on Java to argue that

indigenous male and female producers were able to respond to Dutch textile imports and a local market and indigenous consumption developed. In the ensuing discussion **Andreas Eckert** pointed out the importance of historically differentiating the changing power of statistics over time, as well as the relationship of statistics to the academe and the political sphere. Attention was also drawn to a conceptual difference in the German language between "industrielle Produktion" (large-scale industrial production) and "gewerbliche Produktion" (smaller-scale craft production), which could serve a more nuanced analysis.

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** (University of Vienna) inquired into the concept of underperformance at work in Austria in the first half of the 20th century. Studying the files of disciplinary proceedings against civil servants as well as their self-representation in autobiographies, she discussed the extent to which work avoidance was an implicit potential of civil servants' employment. **Stefano Petrungaro** (Institute for East and Southeast European Studies, 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 recognized work, non-work, and criminal activity. He furthermore showed how the practices of local authorities could profoundly contrast with official, legal definitions of prostitution. **Pete Pesonen** (Finnish Labour Archives, 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. Aiming to historicise non-commercial work, he contextualised it in comparison to both fringe benefits and forms of illicit activities at the workplace, as well as described the different position of the employer, the management and workers themselves in relation to non-commercial work. **Ivan Rajković** (University College, 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. He argued that while this situation led to the appearance of new forms of activity at the work place and thereby the maintaining of a "working system", it also contributed to workers feeling disjointed from the ethos of productivity and experiences, such as complicity and shame. Finally, **Andrew Urban** (Rutgers University) 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. He reflected on this phenomenon as a clash between, on the one side domestic servants and later reform movements trying to routinise their job responsibilities and determine their rights, and on the other side employers trying to establish the duties of domestic servants. As **Sigrid Wadauer** (University of Vienna) in her comments to the panel discussion remarked, the question remained open in the end, to what extent the "work" and "non-work" binary led to covering up differences among activities instead of contributing to their better understanding.

Panel 4 focused on the “invention and remoulding of work” from the perspective of what **Joseph Ehmer** (University of Vienna) in his comments described using the concepts of the “moral economy”, after E.P. Thompson, and “performance”. **Eleonora Canepari** (Aix-Marseille University) 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** (Martin Luther University, Halle-Wittenberg) discussed the evolution of the idea of performance in German intellectual discourses in the early Enlightenment period. While there is an assumed association between the emergence of a new profession-oriented middle class and the Enlightenment at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries, performance was not inherent to the idea of the “enlightened human”. It rather developed in the context of the emergence of a new bourgeoisie and the ensuing political regulation of work and non-work, including professional education for work, the regulation of poverty and the production and design of leisure. Two following presentations engaged with the meanings of work in the state socialist contexts of the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia. **Alexandra Oberländer** (Research Center for East European Studies, Bremen) contrasted the official representation and the self-reflection of former *shabashniki*, intellectuals in Soviet society, who performed physical work in their summer vacation. While their performance officially remained unrecognized by the state, in their personal recollections both self-affirmation in terms of a strong work ethic and financial motivation played an important role. **Amy Watson** (University of 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** (University of 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** (Documentation Centre of Austrian Resistance, DÖW, 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** (University of 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. Reflecting on the concept of work, Grill claimed that the valorisation of active citizenship these programs embedded reinforced the racialized stigmatisation of Roma /Gypsies as “lacking working habits”. Two papers focused on the practice of begging, stereotypically associated with the “ethic of non-production” among Roma. **Cătălina Tesăr** (National Museum of the Romanian Peasant, Bucharest) aiming to reverse this non-Roma work ethic claimed that begging constituted a form of productive activity among Romanian Cortorari Gypsies. **Elisabeth Tauber** (Free University Bozen-Bolzano) continued with the

thematization of female begging and through that the understanding of the concept of work among the Sinti in the Austrian and Italian Alps. She pointed out that the non-separation of economic production and family cohesion and the combined practices of thinking and remembering were characteristic to the Sinti understanding of a person who "has to do". The session's last paper by **Martin Fotta** (University of Kent) analysed informal money-lending practices among the Calons 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 **Sigrid Wadauer's** summary 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 Roma. 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. As a result, contributors engaged substantially with deconstructing and reconstructing the meaning of the concepts of work and non-work, involving in numerous cases next to class and social strata also gender and ethnic/racial differentiation in their analysis. 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.

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