History of Labor Intermediation. Institutions and Individual Ways of Finding Employment (19th and Early 20th Centuries)

Veranstalter: The Production of Work; Thomas Buchner; Alexander Mejstrik; Jessica Richter; Irina Vana; Márton Villànyi; Sigrid Wadauer
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The workshop was opened by SIGRID WADAUER (Vienna), head of the research project „The Production of Work", in the context of which the conference was organized. She gave an introduction on the project's objectives as well as on the workshop's subject.[1] Subsequently, she presented a paper authored by THOMAS BUCHNER (Linz). Buchner emphasized the lack of attention researchers of labor intermediation have paid to actual practices of how people have found work. Buchner firstly focused on the historical, social and cultural assumptions of the terms „work", „job search" and „labor market". He pointed to the relation of these concepts with the concept of wage labor. Furthermore, according to Buchner „job search" implies that people are actively looking for work, neglecting rather passive ways of finding jobs. Following Granowetter, Buchner prefers the term „job finding behavior", as it interprets the effect of finding work as a byproduct of social networks. This also avoids the ambiguity in subsuming different practices under the term „search", in respect to the variety of strategies people pursued to find work in the 19th and 20th centuries. Buchner referred to Licht, who listed 16 different ways of looking for work, i.e. by help of institutions, social networks, newspapers or the calling around system.

Institutional diversity offering placement increased in the 19th century as an effect of the founding and transformation of labor market intermediaries. Institutions such as guilds, commercial job exchanges, trade unions, employers´ organizations and philanthropic societies had developed different operational procedures and objectives in accordance to their specific traditions. Additionally, the understanding of „public" varied between states. Despite these differences, institutions of public intervention are seen as a product of international transfers. There were similarities especially in respect of their perceptions of and their goals for developing labor markets. Two processes in the first half of the 20th century curtailed institutional diversity to some extent: Firstly, the new interlinkage of public labor exchanges and unemployment insurance lead to the control of unemployed, as those deemed „work-shy" were identified and sanctioned. Secondly, the aim of governments to reach a monopoly of and to create a nationwide system of public labor exchanges served to diminish institutional variety.

In the third part Buchner analyzed the relation between labor intermediation and job search in the practices of institutions. Due to the increasing interest of the state to control the workforce, measures implemented by its bodies defined forms of job finding behavior – and therefore forms of non-search as well. According to Buchner, this was a crucial element in the actual construction of labor markets. Optimization processes are linked to the construction process of the labor market itself and can be seen as a way to establish a new form of social order. By the institutions of public labor exchange individuals were for the first time involved with the labor market as a scientific concept. Buchner concluded his introduction by emphasizing the importance of using sources judiciously: Alternative forms of job finding behavior may not be reflected on in easily accessible source material such as that produced by contemporary public institutions. Dominant or highly supported forms of job finding behavior may therefore be overrepresented in scientific research.

The following papers compared practices of labor intermediation and ways of finding employment in the 19th and 20th centuries across a variety of countries in Europe as well as in the Indian labor diaspora and the Ottoman Empire. The lectures of the first section dealt with the changing role of

[1] See also <http://pow.univie.ac.at/aktivitaeten/workshops/history-of-labor-intermediation/abstract-workshop-2-history-of-labor-intermediation/> (30.11.2010).

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trade unions controlling labor supplies and the structural change at the turn of the century. At that time, public labor intermediation bureaus were generated all over Europe. The section finished with discussing how these newly established bureaus contributed to define and differentiate forms of non-work and waged labor.

AD KNOTTER (Maastricht) pointed out to the impact of labor exchange on the control of labor conditions. He focused on the reorganization of labor markets in 19th century Western Europe in respect of the allocation of labor and the mediation processes as well as of the increasing control of workers and unemployed. Knotter discussed this transformation on the basis of the changing role of trade unions in the process of organizing labor exchanges. The „Bourses du Travail" and the Ghent system are two important examples of the changing influence of workers' organizations on labor placement. According to Knotter, trade unions controlled labor supplies in order to maintain wage standards and to shape conditions of resistance. Their provision of unemployment insurance created a minimum level of security. By integrating the trade unions' exchanges in municipal networks, as it was done in the context of the Ghent system, the professional logic structuring labor placement was replaced by a spatial one. Thereby, a dual labor market was created. As a consequence, a new labor market hierarchy was installed on a territorial basis. After the first introduction of the Ghent system in Belgium, unified public institutions replaced labor exchanges run by trade unions in Western Europe. Municipal authorities restricted the unions' criteria to allow benefits for unemployed members. Simultaneously, they incorporated the unions' registration of unemployed members at their own administration. The focus of public labor exchange was to concentrate work to a limited group of workers. The allocation got even more selective by differentiating unemployed according to their perceived willingness and ability to work.

MALCOM MANSFIELD (Paris) presented an overview of the idea of labor intermediation on the basis of the „Bourses du Travail" in France at the turn of the 19th century. The „Bourse" network was an autonomous mechanism of trade unions' labor exchanges which provided labor movement militants with an organizational basis. It became part of a municipal network in Paris after reforms had been implemented by the „Conseil Municipal de Paris". These reforms were supposed to increase the municipalities' influence on the labor movement. The „Bourses du Travail" were criticized, as they maintained union influence on labor placement. This was one reason for closing them down successively between 1893 and 1896. Aiming to change the political situation in France, the „Bourse" network consolidated the emerging trade union movement and demanded a steady minimum wage rate. Although placement activities were low-scaled, decentralized and put into practice predominantly in Marseilles and Paris, the „Bourses" had a strong political impact and a decisive influence on workers' social situations. It eased the isolation of unemployed by organizing various distractions and by providing information material. Moreover, the „Bourses" improved living conditions by initiating public work schemes. This also created a constituency connected to working-class interests. As a result, the network acted as a broker between the workforce and local employers. Furthermore, it supported workers with provisions of traveling benefits, which allowed the network to steer workers away from saturated labor markets. Mansfield described this as a labor market de-concentration, a practice which rendered the legal repression of vagabondage. After the political crisis of the Dreyfus affair, the attitude of the republican government changed to the advantage of the trade union movement. The autonomy of the „Bourses du Travail" was restored and efforts to improve their financial independence were made. In 1900, the network received subsidies for statistical services, allowing it to stipulate wage rates in conformity with different local norms. Simultaneously, the „Bourses" camouflaged the labor market situation by retaining information and by discouraging workers from vagabondage. Several reforms of official placement established free employment agencies, while at the same time the activities of commercial agencies were restricted. This fa-

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cilitated the establishment of employment bureaus.

IRINA VANA (Vienna) reconstructed the impact of public labor offices on the definition of unemployment and waged labor in the interwar period in Austria. She focused on how job seekers used public labor offices and on the organization of the placement practices of public labor offices. The „Unemployment Insurance Act", introduced in 1920, changed placement practices as it influenced the social and regional segregation of different labor markets. Public labor intermediation predominantly targeted male, regular, full-time employees in cities. Vana compared instructions for the labor mediation process, illustrating four practices of mediation: registration, personal counseling, postal assignment and so-called „job-fairs". Practices enacted differed strongly between labor offices and branches. The criteria for placements and the entitlement for unemployment benefits, for example, did not only depend on legislative norms but also on considerations on the labor market situation and on the degree to which the employees' political representation was able to exert influence. Thereby, the definition of the law's term „willingness to work" was an important tool to legitimize the disqualification of an unemployed person. Vana concluded her lecture by pointing out that public labor offices did not have a monopoly on intermediation. The standardization of public labor intermediation, shaped by the „Unemployment Act", did not indicate a homogeneous understanding of waged labor and unemployment. Instead, it referred to new differences regarding the representation of employment and unemployment.

The second section dealt with specific issues Austrian and German labor authorities had to deal with: Firstly, the placement of disabled veterans in Austria during and after the First World War, and secondly the implementation of vocational counseling in the German Weimar Republic.VERENA PAWLOWSKY and HARALD WENDELIN (Vienna) described the concept and practice of reintegrating disabled veterans of the First World War into the labor market of the perishing Habsburg monarchy. Although the Ministry of the Interior developed a new central administration of employment agencies for disabled veterans, it did not subsidize these facilities. Therefore the agencies, whose realization was left to the crown lands themselves, depended on private charity and voluntary work. The degree of state involvement in the employment agencies for disabled veterans remained restricted, although such activities were considered innovative. Although disabled veterans were not the reason for creating a centralized public labor exchange, the concentration of employment agencies can be seen as the adaptation of a new field by the state. The office in Vienna thereby became a role model for creating an official guideline in respect of the aims of the labor mediation process. This guideline included four objectives: Firstly, disabled veterans should be brought back to their former local milieu and social background. Secondly, Vienna's labor market and that of the rather rural region of Lower Austria should be equalized. Thirdly, the agency was obliged to enlarge employment opportunities by stimulating the creation of new jobs for disabled people. The fourth point became the agencies' central task: supporting disabled veterans until they had been found jobs. Disabled veterans were not entitled to benefits; there was only a supplementary raised by private charity, usually not paid in money. According to Pawlowsky and Wendelin, the institution failed to meet its official targets: Disabled veterans could hardly be integrated into the labor market, as they tried to resist such forced labor mediation. Additionally, the structures of the offices were poorly developed and their staff lacked experience. After the war a new law, the „Zwangseinstellungsgesetz" („Compulsive Employment Act"), later renamed as „Invalidenbeschäftigungsgesetz" („Disabled Veterans' Employment Act"), passed the Austrian parliament in 1920. It pledged employers to hire a certain number of disabled veterans proportional to the number of employees at their companies. This shift to a legal obligation has been the basis of Austrian legislation concerning the employment of disabled people until today.

DAVID MESKILL (New York) presented the German state's struggle to establish vocational counseling in the period of the Weimar Republic. The administration aimed to to-

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tally include („Totalerfassung") all job seekers into appropriate skilled work. The realization of this target faced a number of difficulties. A new bureaucracy had to be created, its staff had to be trained and an adequate infrastructure had to be built up. By the „Labor Exchange Act" of 1922 the legal and institutional framework for a national labor market administration was created. It allowed for the establishment of statewide systems of vocational counseling. Nevertheless, other institutions continued to compete with this initiative. Additionally, the law failed to establish an obligation to use vocational counseling bureaus – neither employers nor job seekers had to face sanctions when ignoring them. As a consequence, in each phase of the restructuring process the offices had to convince the public of the justification of their existence. A general mistrust of this politicization and of the very idea of a labor administration based on vocational counseling offices remained amongst the constituents. Additionally, the bureaus themselves were seen as being too bureaucratic to achieve their aims. The reforms included the training of the staff in order to achieve a formalized knowledge of how vocational counseling should be put into practice. A standardized school questionnaire, moreover, was used as a tool to gather information on young people. To gain support by employers, psychological evaluations were also part of these reforms. The whole process of establishing a statewide system of vocational counseling as a part of the labor administration was accompanied by the conflicting objectives to both apply scientific knowledge and achieve immediate practical success.

The third section initially dealt with Jan Lucassen's intense reconstruction of labor mediation processes organized by seasonal workers in Lippe, part of the German principality of Lippe-Detmold. Afterwards, Amit Kumar Mishra discussed the role of intermediaries in the Indian labor diaspora. In the third part of the section, M. Erdem Kabadayi analyzed petitioning practices as a method of labor mediation in the Ottoman Empire at the end of the 19th century. JAN LUCASSEN (Amsterdam) presented a paper conjointly written by PIET LOURENS (Amsterdam) and himself. They focused on labor mediation processes among seasonal workers, especially the Lippe brick makers in the period between 1650 and 1900.

Lucassen introduced his research and the methods used to create their sample of 500 male brick makers. These biographies and careers were reconstructed to discuss the structural and individual factors that enabled the Lippe brick makers to build up a kind of career in the context of their labor system. This system was structured by the individual organization of work, based on choice and individual preferences. Structural conditions were shaped by practices such as the cooperative subcontracting on piece rates, the messenger system and internal mobility within the gangs of brick makers. The paper's central question concerned the constraints which determined the level of career achieved by different individuals. Lourens and Lucassen distinguished four groups of factors. The first group was related to a person's social capital (the father-in-law playing a decisive role), to the change of residence (perceived as being accompanied by a gain in social experience) as well as to the conditions and opportunities deriving from a certain place of birth. Secondly, Lucassen presented the analysis of the opportunity structure in the region of destination in respect of labor opportunities within a particular *Ziegelbote*-district. Thirdly, the workers' physical ability was assessed by examining their death circumstances as well as fourthly, talent, skills, initiative or other psychological qualities which were measured by e. g. success on the marriage market. Lucassen concluded his lecture by emphasizing the role of the individual in the formation of gangs, which he regarded as being highly important for a better understanding of job mediation mechanisms. A second conclusion was drawn more tentatively: Not the social background seems to be crucial but the individual's willingness to achieve a career within the meritocratic *Ziegelbote* system.

AMIT KUMAR MISHRA (Hyderabad) examined the dynamic role of *sardars, kanganie_s and _maistries* as labor intermediaries in the Indian labor diaspora during the 19th and early 20th centuries. Firstly, Mishra gave an overview of the historical premise in the making of the Indian labor diaspora by de-

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scribing the structures, agencies and destinations of the immigration of Indian workers in that particular period. Thereby, he contextualized the immigration of Indian workers to the British plantation settlements in the process of capitalist expansion under the rule of the British colonial order. Secondly, Mishra analyzed the role of intermediaries in their three domains of intermediation. He also reflected on their contribution to the making and the functioning of the labor regime, and to its transformation. Such intermediaries' roles were to some extent consistent with traditional forms of Indian socio-economic organization. Therefore, they were able to conciliate the differing social and cultural traditions of plantation elites and their subordinate workers.

M. ERDEM KABADAYI (Istanbul) discussed petitioning practices as a method to find and regain employment at state industrial enterprises in the Ottoman Empire in the last quarter of the 19th century. Kabadayi discussed whether or not this particular period of time marked a turning point in the dynamics of labor regulations and state employment policies in the Ottoman Empire and in the Habsburg monarchy. After putting the socio-political structures and work processes of the Fez factory in a contextual framework, Kabadayi described petitions as a privileged communicative space in which workers negotiated their working conditions with the state, or rather the Sultan. Due to the absence of public labor exchange institutions, Kabadayi viewed petitioning as a form of labor mediation, which also came into practice with the help of third parties, often female family members supporting the jobseeker. An important difference between the Habsburg Monarchy and the Ottoman Empire concerning labor mediation can be seen in the absence of public labor offices in the socio-economic organization of the latter. If employment offices were part of the construction of a labor market, Kabadayi asked, which consequences could be drawn from the fact that they were missing in the Ottoman Empire?

The fourth section focused on different strategies of looking for work and making a living, dealing with the examples of composers in the first paper and domestic servants in the second one. ANNA G. PIOTROWSKA (Krakow) presented strategies of composers to find employment in America and Europe in the 19th and at the beginning of the 20th century. Composers in the 19th century depended on rich male or female patrons or family support. Additionally, they could teach music, work as conductors, or they could act as traveling virtuosos. While composers in the 19th century tried to cultivate a romantic image of themselves as artistic bohemians separated from the problems of everyday life, new strategies in the 20th century aimed to achieve a formal and stable income to be able to support the composers themselves and their families. Traditional strategies remained important, although actual practices changed. For instance, patronage was still common in the 20th century, but now it was practiced as a form of state patronage e. g. in the former Soviet Union, or foundations acted as such. The strategy of teaching music could be realized as employment at universities in the 20th century. Additionally, the emergence of numerous festivals allowed composers to travel, to earn money with their art and to exchange experiences with other musicians. Working for film studios or as music journalists, critics and authors were new opportunities to find a livelihood as composers. Such new possibilities indicate a commodification process; music was becoming a product. Although the solutions of former epochs were never abandoned by composers, new strategies of finding work as musicians became more established.

JESSICA RICHTER (Vienna) explored how domestic servants' associations perceived their clientele's changes of employment on the basis of official association magazines. She contrasted her findings with biographical accounts of former domestic servants in which a variety of forms to make a living were mentioned. According to her, the Catholic „Reichsverband der christlichen Hausgehilfinnen" aimed to protect job seeking women from dangers associated with city life (e.g. trafficking in women, „immoral" life styles), and it attempted to counter changes of employment. She stressed that labor intermediation was supposed to lead into stable employ-

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ment in accordance to the target of long-term family integration. Furthermore, it was one of the association's tools for the economic and moral protection of job seekers. This idea behind intermediation is compared with that of the social-democratic trade union „Einigkeit". According to Richter, „Einigkeit" saw domestic servants as being exploited by employers, and it aimed to integrate them into the workers' movement. Changes of employment were understood as an outcome of the weak labor market position of domestic servants. The union used labor intermediation as an instrument to protect domestic servants from impoverishment when unemployed and to secure minimum wages, amongst other things. Richter stated, however, that neither loyalty to employers nor a close connection to the workers' movement were reflected by domestic servants' accounts. Domestic servants changed their employment frequently. They not only worked in different forms of service but also in other forms of employment or unpaid in the households of their families of origin. Patterns of employment and job changes differed between individual servants, depending for example on the way they contributed to sustaining their families. Neither their commitment to their own families was taken into account by domestic servants' associations nor was the fact that families supported them when being unemployed.

To sum it up, the conference provided an intense overview of the construction and differentiation of nationalized labor markets, the role of various institutions in this field and how subjects developed strategies to deal with new mechanisms of control. The conference emphasized the fluidity of labor exchange processes as it traced the reworking of definitions concerning work, un/employment as well as distinctions of formal and informal parts of the labor economy. The focus lay on the institutional practice of labor exchanges, and what it meant to job seekers, developing job searching strategies, to be subjected to those practices.

Conference Overview

Sigrid Wadauer (University of Vienna), Thomas Buchner (University of Linz): Welcome and Introduction

Section 1:

Ad Knotter (Sociaal Historisch Centrum voor Limburg / Maastricht University): Mediation, Allocation, Control: The Changing Faces of Labor Exchanges in Belgium and The Netherlands (Late 19th / Early 20th Centuries)

Malcolm Mansfield (Université de Paris 3): The Very Idea of Labor Intermediation: The Bourses du Travail in Turn of the Century France

Irina Vana (University of Vienna): Public Labor Offices and the Hierarchies Between Different Forms of Unemployment and Employment (1918 –1938)

Chair: Sigrid Wadauer

Section 2:

Verena Pawlowsky (University of Vienna), Harald Wendelin (University of Vienna): The Austrian Employment Agency for Disabled Veterans During the First World War

David Meskill (Dowling College): Between Labor Market Constituencies: The Struggles to Establish Vocational Counseling in Weimar Germany

Chair: Jessica Richter

Section 3:

Jan Lucassen (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam / International Institute of Social Science): Labor Mediation Among Seasonal Workers, in Particular the Lippe Brick Makers c. 1650 –1900

Amit Kumar Mishra (University of Hyderabad, India): Sardars, Kanganies and Maistries: Intermediaries in Indian Labor Diaspora

M. Erdem Kabadayı (Istanbul Bilgi University): Petitioning as a Way to Find and Regain Employment at State Industrial Enterprises in the Ottoman Empire in the Late 19th Century

Chair: Irina Vana

Section 4:

Anna G. Piotrowska (Jagiellonian University): Individual Strategies of Labor Intermediation Among Early 20th Century American and Eu-

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ropean Composers

Jessica Richter (University of Vienna): Between Service, Labor and Subsistence: Self-Sustainment and Perceptions of Changes of Employment (Austria, 1918 –1938)

Chair: Alexander Mejstrik

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