

**„Nicht-Arbeit“: multidisziplinäre
Auseinandersetzungen mit einer
analytischen Kategorie**

Veranstalter: Institut für Ost- und Südosteuropaforschung (IOS), Regensburg

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The workshop was prompted by a concept which is increasingly used by some academic literature as well as in the mass media: „non-work“. The aim was to test its virtues and disadvantages in an interdisciplinary perspective. The discussion about the concept should also serve as an occasion for examining several social phenomena which are included in the wide field of the „non-work“: the extremely „precarious“ jobs typical for the present time, as well as domestic labor, the „moonlight economy“, and the endless series of occupations always swinging between the field of the officially and socially recognized „work“, and the field of „non-work“. The border between what is considered „work“ and the „rest“ has never been sharp. The aim of the workshop was to focus on the „negation“ of work on its moral, political, and analytical implications.

In his introduction STEFANO PETRUNGARO (Regensburg) focused on the history of the concept of „non-work“ with regard to the last two centuries. While in the past a dichotomy was established between the field of „work“ and „non-work“ – understanding the last one as the private field, the free-time, family and hobby related field –, in the second half of the 20th century a multi-vocal critics emerged (one should think first of all of the feminist writings) which put in question such a distinction. Now the concept of „non-work“ is currently used, especially in the sociological research, with reference to the wide range of „irregular“ employment relations, which characterize the present time. But various humanities and social sciences have been dealing for a long time with such „marginal“ social phenomena, today defined as „precarious jobs“, „underemployment“, and „informal sector of economy“.

The social anthropologist CHRISTIAN GIORDANO (Fribourg, Switzerland) introduced the dimension of the „values“, of the „representations“ and of the „meaning“ which are ascribed to the practices of „work“ and „non-work“. He illustrated, based on South-European case-studies, some examples of positive evaluation of idleness, conceived as a privilege of the members of the upper classes, and linked with a rural idealization of the urban life. Secondly, Giordano put informal economy in relation to the state: the countless social and economic „unofficial“ practices are often the manifestation of „distrust“ towards authorities; therefore they are a strategy adopted towards a state machinery which is perceived as alien and inefficient, legal but considered illegitimate.

EKATERINA SELEZNEVA (Regensburg) illustrated how economic sciences and statistics approached the examined phenomena. During the 20th century a general awareness increased regarding the inadequacy of classical categories like „employed“, „unemployed“ and „out of the labor market“ (the last one mainly referring to children, old people and those who are not looking for a job). „Unemployment“ is actually composed by numerous subcategories (cyclical, seasonal unemployment etc.), nothing to say about the innumerable „borderline cases“, which cannot fit into a simplistic and rigid categorization, least of all in contemporary societies, characterized by so called „transitional labor markets“ (i.e. that the „education-employment-retirement“ cycle, typical of the „traditional“ labor markets is not up to date anymore). Apart from underemployment there are actually phenomena like the „hidden employment“ and its various forms of „non-employment“, which are very difficult to be statistically measured.

LEONHARD FUEST (Hamburg) surveyed some aspects of the varied relations between literature and „non-work“, investigated with a „farmacopoetological“ approach: discussions around work and its negations are always linked with considerations of medical origin and of biopolitical nature, which question the „sane“ or „insane“ nature of inactivity and their effects on society. If the „free time“ („die Muße“), and the „contemplation“

are positive concepts, the „idleness“ („der Müßiggang“) and „laziness“ are vices, which evoke the „toxicity“ of idleness in the present time. But literary works which describe and give voice to those phenomena do not bear clear and definitive borders and definitions. Even the apologists of inactivity and idleness reveal in modern times the dense and controversial link which ties „non-work“ with violence and unhappiness. This has also to do with the „laziness“ of the „text“, which does not „work“ for clarity and univocity, but shows all its ambivalences.

The paper of GIANLUCA SOLLA (Verona) dealt with the notion of „Lumpensammler“ (the ragman) in the modern age, when the collection of rags assumed new meanings linked with the development of capitalism. The „exploitation“, which is a fundamental law of modernity, affected in a new way every field and included natural resources, human lives and bodies, up to the waste. The activity of the ragman, as observed by Walter Benjamin, showed an elective affinity with the craft of the historian, who collects details and places them side by side. The aim here is not to classically reconstruct a totality, but to preserve the fractures of reality. This has to do with the essential heterogeneity of that category which refers to those social actors who Marx and Engels defined as Lumpenproletariat. They actually did not give a definition of that, considering it not a „class“, but an inevitable, immoral, counterrevolutionary „rest“.

ANDREA KOMLOSY (Wien) picked the central theme of the relation between formalization and informalization of labor relations putting them in a historical and global perspective. The concept of „work“, which represents the basis for building its negative, the „non-work“, is the product of a specific European development (the industrial capitalism) and it is therefore not appropriate for describing and analyzing extra-European contexts. With regard to West-European countries, the first wave of formalization of labor relations, linked with the birth of a modern labor legislation and welfare state, began in the 1880s. But the same process can be read very differently, i.e. as a process of de-regulation, if one thinks of the radical limitations imposed to the forms of corporative and lord-serfs rules,

which has to make room for the new labor relations. A second wave of social laws took place in the 1920s, a third one in the 1960-70s, after which a general (global) growth of the „informal“ sector occurred.

The workshop gave the opportunity to collect numerous inputs for all those who are interested in such topics. The concept of „non-work“ was not free of ambiguities which allowed to develop a radically interdisciplinary discussion. Rigid and specialist classifications do not help the dialogue between the disciplines, which also need „inclusive“ concepts for a common discussion. Neither of the other categories generally used for conceiving the examined phenomena are univocal, but relative and linked with the approach and the context. Every single discipline actually tends to use, according to their own methodologies and research goals, several concepts, sometimes more specific, in order to deepen and to specify the analysis. What unanimously emerged, was the importance to deal with the various social phenomena linked with the field of „non-work“, which in the past was considered the exception and has now become the rule.

Conference Overview:

Welcome: Ulf Brunnbauer (Regensburg)

Introduction: Stefano Petrunaro (Regensburg)

Christian Giordano (Fribourg): Illegale und halblegale Arbeitsrollen in der informellen Ökonomie. Sozialanthropologische Perspektiven aus Gesellschaften des öffentlichen Misstrauens

Ekaterina Selezneva (Regensburg): Towards more flexibility: flexicurity and transitional labour markets approach

Leonhard Fuest (Hamburg): Nichtstun und Revolte. Zu einer aufgeladenen Semantik in der modernen Literatur

Gianluca Solla (Verona): Ver(sch)wendung. Der Lumpensammler als Geheimsignatur der Moderne

Andrea Komlosy (Wien): Ungeregt und unterbezahlt. Der informelle Sektor in der Weltwirtschaft

Tagungsbericht „Nicht-Arbeit“: *multidisziplinäre Auseinandersetzungen mit einer analytischen Kategorie*. 11.10.2013, Regensburg, in: H-Soz-Kult 09.11.2013.