

**Shipyards as Transforming Workplaces.
Methods of Grasping Shop-Floor
Experiences „From Below“**

Veranstalter: Institute for East European History, University of Vienna; Leibniz-Institute for East- and South European Studies, Regensburg; Gdynia City Museum

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The subject of the workshop was the economic and social consequences of neoliberal reforms, as well as system transformation in Poland and other post-communist countries, all of which was analyzed from many perspectives. Apart from sophisticated political analysis of transformation in Poland and other countries in the region (in terms of politics and international relations), it seems that there is still a potential for other perspectives. From this point of view, a crucial question seems to revolve around the fate of employees of heavy industry, for example shipyards during and after the transformation. Interesting questions here relate to the connections between changes in everyday social relations and large-scale transformation. An international team of scholars working in the frames of the project „Transformations from Below. Shipyards and Labor Relations in the Uljanik (Croatia) and Gdynia (Poland) Shipyards since the 1980s“, aim to tackle these questions based both on oral history as well as on archival research.

The workshop began with a presentation by PHILIPP THER (Vienna). He focused on objectives of the project, investigating histories of the transformations from state socialism to a market-based liberal order, as well as grasping connections between changes in everyday social relations and large-scale transformation. He also emphasized three levels of analysis concerning transformations of the Uljanik and Gdynia shipyards. These are: workers and other employee groups in the company, social milieus shaped by the workplace but also by structures outside the factory gate, and the shipbuilding companies as sites of production.

The opening presentation was followed by

a keynote speech from DAVID JORDHUS-LIER (Oslo). He discussed the reshaping of the character of employment as affected by the realities of globalization, using as an example the hotel industry in Norway. He particularly stressed the influence of temporary work agencies on different hotel employees, such as waiters and cleaning staff. His main thesis, based on a special questionnaire completed by employees from different hotels, is that increased flexibility of employment in the hotel sector, created by temporary work agencies, resulted in an increased sense of anxiety and instability among hotel workers. Another interesting fact is the huge difference in the union membership rate between Scandinavians and migrants from new EU countries namely Central-Eastern Europe. In his presentation, BARTOSZ MIKA (Gdańsk) covered the topic of shipyard workers who were made redundant during the transformations of the Gdynia and Gdańsk shipyards. The main reference point for him was the „Balcerowicz plan“, which rapidly altered the Polish economy model from a socialist and state-dominated into a liberal capitalistic after 1989. These reforms affected shipyard workers and their families to a great extent. His paper reported on a pilot study conducted among shipyard workers from Gdynia and Gdańsk. He managed to reconstruct the fates of different specialists, who were forced to reshape their professional activities by finding new jobs outside the shipbuilding industry. During his research, Mika focused on such factors as the intra-generational social mobility of former shipyard workers, and the fate of their adult children. According to his study, generally, shipyard workers who were made redundant after finding new jobs still remained among the working class. However, their children typically occupied a different class position from their parents.

CHIARA BONFIGLIOLI (Cork) described the situation of inhabitants of the Croatian city of Pula, where two main state-owned enterprises, the Uljanik shipyard and the Arena Trikotaža clothing plant, went bankrupt. During her research, she conducted over 20 interviews with former workers of these factories. These interviews showed a huge deal of nostalgia towards big plants and the social secu-

rity present in former Yugoslavia. In her paper, Chiara Bonfiglioli managed to grasp how shocking the bankruptcy of Arena Trikotaža plant was for the local community. This shock particularly influenced female employees for whom this factory was not only a place of work, but also a reason for pride. She also managed to describe the way in which post-industrial areas in Pula were transformed into museums, pubs, and leisure centers.

In her presentation, MARTA MADEJSKA (Łódź) characterized oral history interviews with women who worked at the clothing factory „Uniontex“ in the Polish city of Łódź. Based on individual memories, she managed to reconstruct many individual emotions connected to economic transformation, during which Łódź, as a capital of the clothing industry suffered great losses, with many companies going bankrupt. Madejska managed to document many examples of individual stories, often marked with a sense of disappointment, bitterness, and a feeling of being misguided by political and social elites.

The second panel of the workshop was devoted to various characters of sources enabling the grasp of a „perspective from below“, on the experiences of ordinary workers. A large part of this section was devoted to the everyday life of employees.

ŁUKASZ JASIŃSKI (Gdynia) provided an insight into the local structures of *Solidarność* in the Gdynia Paris Commune shipyard from 1980-81. The main source he utilized in this presentation were the gazettes of *Solidarność* from that period. According to his research, local structures of *Solidarność* in Gdynia shipyard acted much more like an ordinary trade union as opposed to a social movement with vivid political aspirations. It also aimed to improve the organization of work in the Gdynia shipyard as well as to create a sense of genuine responsibility among workers for their place of work. Thus, *Solidarność* bulletins can serve as a unique source in order to grasp a perspective from below onto big social movements and changes.

GORAN MUSIĆ and RORY ARCHER (Graz) investigated newspapers published by various enterprises in former Yugoslavia as well as archival sources in order to understand the everyday life of working class communities

focused around employee-managed factories. In their paper, they discussed the usefulness and reliability of different sources concerning the situation in Yugoslavian enterprises in the 1980s. Apart from above-mentioned bulletins, which contain biased information and a party-centered point of view, they focused on sociological surveys in order to reconstruct the „microcosmos“ of big industries. These sources also help to learn about such aspects as consumption habits, housing, and general level of welfare. In this context, oral history also plays an important role. This type of source can also be a useful tool for gaining additional information.

OGNJEN KOJANIĆ (Pittsburgh) presented a case study of an enterprise named ITAS from the metal working business, which has undergone a process of privatization. In his presentation, he stressed the discrepancy present between the workers of this company, and the Croatian elites in terms of how the future of this enterprise should look like. Based on an oral history approach, in order to grasp the shop-floor perspective, he discovered that workers were much more interested in social and everyday issues than different models of worker ownership. He also focused on generational divisions among ITAS workers in terms of using modern computer equipment, globalization, and so forth. He also worked to comprehend wide differences in social and cultural capital between ordinary workers and elites.

PIOTR FILIPKOWSKI (Vienna) together with PETER WEGENSCHIMMEL (Regensburg) described the environment of Gdynia shipyard engineers in the times of communist Poland. In their paper, they focus on engineers as, on the one hand, „the avant-garde“ of modernization processes in communist Poland, yet also as Polish „technocrats“ and representatives of the *intelligentsia*. They also mentioned methodological aspects of oral history as methods of gaining the perspective of shipyard engineers. Moreover, they investigated the influence of the local cell of the Polish United Worker's Party in the process of building ships, particularly, how the typical problems caused by a socialist economy led to insufficient management of the production process in the late 1970s and early 80s.

AGNIESZKA BACŁAWSKA-KORNACKA (Gdańsk) provided an insight into the Gdańsk shipyard through the prism of Zenon Mirota, a photographer employed in this plant. His photos are currently on display in form of virtual exhibition at the the European Solidarity Centre website in Gdańsk. Over many decades, Mirota became a chronicler of the shipyard, documenting scenes from everyday ordeals of the shipyard and its workers. His photos combine a documentary character, depicting Gdańsk shipyard as a complex of objects, with its artistic values. This presentation showed that photography could also be utilized as one of the sources enabling a deeper understanding of the shop-floor perspective.

Conference overview:

Introduction: Philipp Ther (University of Vienna)

Keynote: David Jordhus-Lier (University of Oslo): Fragmented Solidarity and Constrained Agency in the Globalized Workplace

Session 1: Narrating Workplace Changes

Chair: Jan Szkudliński (Gdynia City Museum)

Bartosz Mika (University of Gdańsk): Intra and Intergenerational Social Mobility of Industrial Working Class: An Example of Shipyard Workers from Gdańsk and Gdynia

Chiara Bonfiglioli (University College Cork): Women Worked at Arena Trikotaža, Men Worked at Uljanik': Gender and Labour History from Below in Pula

Marta Madejska (Museum of Art, Łódź) The Chronicles of Transformation: Oral History and Media on the Story of the „Uniontex“ Textile Factory in Łódź

Session 2: Sources from Below

Chair: Philipp Ther (University of Vienna)

Łukasz Jasiński (Gdynia City Museum): The Solidarity Carnival 1980-1981 in Gdynia in the Scope of Press and Gdynia City Museum Archives

Goran Musić & Rory Archer (University of Graz): Approaching the Socialist Factory and Its Workforce „From Below“ in a Yugoslav

Context

Ognjen Kojanić (University of Pittsburgh): What Does „Elite“ and „From Below“ Mean in a Worker-Owned Company?

Session 3: The Shipbuilders' Lifeworlds

Chair: Stefano Petrungaro (University of Venice)

Piotr Filipkowski (University of Vienna) & Peter Wegenschimmel (Leibniz Institute for East and Southeast European Studies, Regensburg): Does Anybody Know Production? The Shipyard from Engineers' Perspective.

Agnieszka Baćławska-Kornacka (European Solidarity Center, Gdańsk): The Shipyard by Mirota

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