The Production of Work. Welfare, labour-market and the disputed boundaries of labour (1880-1938) - Synopsis of Previous Results (26.5.2011)

Dr. Sigrid Wadauer
Department of Economic and Social History
University of Vienna
Maria-Theresien-Straße 9/4
A-1090 Vienna
sigrid.wadauer@univie.ac.at

The project analyses how certain forms of livelihood were normalized as work and how this affected other ways of making a living. This *production* of work is not to be understood as in-/exclusion. Rather, the empirical results of our studies have highlighted the variety of livelihoods as well as hierarchies which range from dominant forms of vocational employment (via ambiguous kinds of work) to situations appearing quite different from work (e.g., family, crime). For vocation (or *Beruf)* has proven to be crucial in all sub-areas of our research inasmuch as it was normalized as the most legitimate way to work. Even dominated forms of livelihood made reference to it. Our findings also indicate the importance of households, confirming the assumption that the production of work cannot be understood by focussing exclusively on work.

Starting in the late nineteenth century, many European states tried to establish **public labour intermediation.** Much attention has been given to Germany as a precursor. There a tight net of municipal labour exchanges was set up in the 1890s (the subject of one of our work tasks which commenced in October of 2010.) In Austria, public labour exchanges were only established and coordinated countrywide after World War I. Public labour intermediation was discussed as a remedy for problems of industrial societies, yet it did

not just intervene in pre-existing labour markets, as both contemporaries and historians assumed. Instead, intermediation measures contributed to a (re-)definition of problems in terms of national labour markets, as *unemployment, irregularities of employment, occupational fluctuation, mobility* (i.e., vagrancy) and *rural depopulation*. Our analysis highlights how the administration of labour markets defined its subjects selectively. As a result, it normalized occupations, work as a commodity, and the national labour market. It also produced descriptive data in which *the* labour market was realized as a category of economic thought and as a social fact. In analogy to the invention (or discovery) of *unemployment*, we can speak of the invention of a national labour market. In the same sense, our analyses illustrate how the **vocational census** (1934) and the **census of enterprises** (1930) did not merely describe Austrian vocations (*Berufe* as opposed to *Beschäftigungen*, or occupations) and enterprises, but *prescribed* (Bourdieu) in equal measure a socio-economic order.

Public labour exchanges were also shaped by their clientele, whose impact was closely related to the establishment of unemployment benefits after World War I. In examining the **usage of labour exchanges,** we have analysed autobiographical accounts using Geometric Data Analysis (GDA). This lets us systematically describe the variants of (and contrasts in) being out of work and searching for employment, particularly on the interwar period. The most important principle of variation is the reference to normalized employment. On the one hand, stable employment based on formal occupational training gave citizens access to social insurance (as a social right). Time spent out of work could be lived (and conceived of) as *unemployment* – a collective and market-related problem and one which applied to men more than women. Previous researchers claimed that the initial idea of unemployment was historically related to skilled occupations. Yet we believe that the possibility of unemployment was just as much a precondition for the normalization of vocation. For it allowed one to have a livelihood without taking on employment indiscriminately, at least for a certain period of time. On the other hand, unstable employment without the benefit of formal training was linked with fewer social entitlements. It was manifested in extreme cases by service (*Dienst*). Furthermore, our

results highlight the importance of household relations. Particularly in times of crisis, support from an intact family household was crucial for spatial and occupational stability.

In the interwar period, service was still one of the most important ways for women to make a living. It was often regarded as a counter-model or as a particular kind of labour. Unlike previous research, our analysis includes a **broad variety of service labour,** from households to agriculture and trade. The GDA analysis of a data set constructed from various sources allows us to compare the highly differentiated ways in which persons earned a livelihood over the life course. Generally, we find that job instability was extremely widespread. Distinctions between service, helping out one's own family, casual assistance and wage employment were anything but clear. Yet attempts to normalize service as employment or even as a vocation were implemented by the state and particularly by charity organisations and labour unions. All these aimed at regulating work relations, training and skills. Nonetheless, the embeddedness in households (the very principle of personal service) posed fundamental obstacles.

In many respects, our results emphasize that a new notion of vocation became a dominant reference of gainful employment. *Vocation* implied a promise of continuity and a lifelong career as well as identification and fulfilment. It was an important agenda (and result) of state policy, intended to advance the common good. Citizens' dedication to their vocation – as monitored by labour administration – promised the success of the entire nation. Young people were the target of such policies (especially through vocational counselling). Consequently, **vocation** and **youth** (both as *universalized* categories) were fashioned in reference to each another. The youth of a nation should not only work but also strive for a vocation – and the *nation's* vocation should be practiced by all of them. The political and economic crises of the 1930s seem to have facilitated this normalization as well.

The normalization of job-seeking – not independently of vocation but independently of a *particular* vocation or *particular* membership in an occupational organisation – was a first step towards the normalizing of unemployment by the state. Relief stations, established in the Habsburg Monarchy in the 1880s, aimed at enforcing a distinction between **labour-seeking wayfarers and vagrants.** They were at the core of socio-political debate at the time, bringing together agendas of welfare, internal security and labour policy. Compared

to similar facilities in other countries, the legal status of the relief stations was unique. A quantitative analysis of their registries along with published data reveals an astonishing degree of otherwise undocumented mobility. At the same time, it indicates more precisely how relief stations were used and accessed. Whereas before World War I male skilled labourers and craftsmen were almost the only ones found there, the number of unskilled labourers registered in them increased drastically after the war. It was often questioned whether women, servants and agricultural labourers needed to go on the tramp at all. When they were not explicitly excluded, they still formed a minority of the visitors. Autobiographical accounts also show a selective usage of stations, particularly by skilled labourers. Mobility was not a mere reflex of economic conditions.

Our findings also suggest the significance of **manifold kinds of income and social exchange apart from governmental support**. These ranged from casual labour, petty trade, itinerant crafts, busking, family support, customary exchanges, and gifts all the way to alms and other criminalized exchanges. A sample of court records from a number of districts (between 1920 and 1938) regarding violations of the vagrancy laws help us explore such attempts at earning a living while describing how residents, police and courts dealt with them. Common assumptions about the "typical" vagrant as young, single and unskilled (albeit employable) can be rectified by bi- and multivariate analyses in which the data show variations and contrasts in livelihood. One finds strategies of both native, sedentary, and younger married persons and of unsedentary skilled workers of diverse (non-Austrian) nationalities who were not married. In general, incomplete families seemed most common among the accused. The poor acknowledged as deserving – such as the elderly, unemployable or war invalids – were a vanishing minority. Efforts to verify defences and need was made for sedentary court defendants but only rarely for vagrant foreigners or Gypsies. The court cases analysed also manifest a conflicts over the legitimacy of customary exchanges (permissions to beg, the viaticum, gifts, and so forth).

We decided to focus one work task of our research on ways of earning **income through entertainment**. This way, we could include another important kind of non-work which contrasted with normalized occupations and which developed on account of labour regulations: leisure time. Specifically, its emergence created a market for entertainment

and thus new possibilities for making a living. One example was performing music, ranging from occasional busking to professional entertainment. Our recent work tasks (as of October 2010) have examined this aspect as well as the **right and duty to work**.

To improve our **methodological tools**, we organized trainings on GDA that were open to other research groups as well. In comparison to our previous studies, we developed and tested new ways of constructing observational protocols and samples. A unit of observation might consist of an aspect of a biographical account, a sequence of narration, an administrative case comprised of interrelated practices of the various parties involved. With respect to the construction of variables, more emphasis is now placed on language usage but – unlike many publications on the history of work – we do not confuse words with concepts. Furthermore, we have employed GDA to analyse a data set derived from the vocational census of 1934 and the census of enterprises in 1930. Usually, analyses of census data stick to the published uni- and bivariate distributions. By contrast, GDA enables researchers to describe districts and regions by simultaneously including a greater number of variables on occupations, age, religion, enterprises, etc. As a result, we have been able to classify districts and regions systematically. However, we do not understand these data as scientific data or a representation of reality but rather as contemporaneous attempts to describe and prescribe the national workforce. The analysis shows how statisticians of the period struggled with attempts to create coherent descriptions of economic enterprises, sectors, and markets.