

Excerpt from the final activity report

Sigrid Wadauer, Department of Economic and Social History, University of Vienna, Austria
Email: sigrid.wadauer@univie.ac.at

All rights reserved. No part of this working paper may be reproduced or utilized in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by information storage or retrieval system, without permission from the author.

Instead of investigating “work” (however it is defined), this project researched the everyday struggles over work and the practices that produced it in consensus and conflict (with a focus on Austria and Germany). In this way, work was consistently historicized.

Since the late nineteenth century, work became increasingly a matter of state policy. The state did not only regulate work and intervene in labour relations but contributed substantially to bringing forth and normalizing new social facts: “work” in a new sense, implying “labour market”, or “unemployment”. (Normalization is understood here as the production of a historical phenomenon as common to all citizens and normative as well.) Nonetheless, work was never exclusively a matter of the state or its various (not always homogeneously and concurrently acting) forms of administration. We therefore considered the interrelations between the different parties and perspectives involved – even those that seemed powerless or dominated: from various forms of administration and state policy, via collective, e.g. scholarly, representations to individual representations in autobiographical writings, letters, and protocols.

The project investigated how work was produced in several contexts, focussing on situations in which the meaning and value of work were at stake, for instance in labour market administration and labour intermediation. Setting up labour offices, and integrating (or regulating) already existing forms of intermediation were among the first measures of the state. We analysed the various uses made of labour offices and in addition the interrelation between administrative practices and (scholarly) representations of labour market and working population. Further subprojects dealt with livelihood organized in the context of households and service, livelihood and mobility, forced and free workfare programs, and with music as art or a means to find livelihood.

To analyse how new forms and notions of work emerged, the project did not only consider practices that were officially acknowledged as work. Rather it explored the multitude and broad variety of livelihoods, as “work” or “non-work”. We included and compared in our analysis activities ranging from vocational employment (requiring training and offering a career and new forms of social security), to more ambiguous or allegedly traditional forms of livelihood – such as services (*Dienste*) in the context of household and farms – types of self-employment (often neglected in research), all the way to highly disputed or illegitimate forms of searching for livelihood (itinerate trades, begging, vagrancy or forced labour). We found manifold terms for “work” in the source materials: *Arbeit* (work), *Beruf* (vocation), *Beschäftigung* (employment), *Verdienst* (earning), *Lebensunterhalt* (a living), *Brot* (bread), *Auskommen* (making ends meet) etc. Often the term “work” is completely missing; instead, there are terms describing particular practices. This linguistic multiplicity is not arbitrary, for the various forms of livelihood cannot be subsumed under a particular idea of work. Rather, they represent context-bound hierarchies and differences. This persistent heterogeneity also becomes evident in the changing ways people made a living throughout their lives. In the past, normalized vocational work did not represent the majority of livelihoods but became an important point of reference manifested in diverse contexts.

Our research dismissed notions of “core”, “typical” or “marginal” work. New social rights implied a willingness to perform work acknowledged as decent. Hence, the fight against illegitimate forms of livelihood, such as vagrancy and begging, was not an anachronism but just the flipside of the coin for an emerging welfare regime. The struggles surrounding these livelihoods reveal crucial questions about the new welfare state. Once new forms of work emerged, allegedly “traditional” forms of livelihood changed as well.

Methodologies

Our research aimed at systematically reconstructing and analysing variations and hierarchies in the diverse sub-fields of the projects. Structural samples were created to explore and include cases that represent the most important of these differences. We used and combined a broad range of source material: autobiographical writings, interviews, letters, administrative records etc. Particular emphasis was placed on systematically capturing terms that designated livelihood and work. The data were analysed using techniques of Geometrical Data Analysis. Seldom used in social history, they are very useful for examining complex and messy data. From this perspective, we also re-analysed and re-interpreted census data.

While here we could build on our experience in previous projects (Mejstrik and Wadauer), this time we used new and different ways of constructing units of observation. A unit might thus refer to a representation of a life, a certain period of life or an administrative case concerning either a concerned party or an administrative occurrence (e.g. an application for a licence, a violation of law or an admission to a facility). Accordingly, units of observation could include statements of any of the assorted parties involved. The person, as a quasi natural unit of analysis was dismissed. These results allowed us to observe the specific logic of particular sources, their advantages and disadvantages, as well as the implications of different ways of constructing units. They were able to make the interrelation of various parties observable.

To conclude: this research program permits to overcome the opposition between quantitative and qualitative approaches, and between statistical analysis and the analysis of discourse. Analysis of linguistic usage of language was integrated with socio-historical analysis, permitting the analysis of singular units to be combined with the analysis of the structure and history of an institution.

[...]

Conclusions

It is commonly assumed that the concept of work became more restricted in the twentieth century. Yet this premise seems inadequate for understanding its normalization. On the one hand, work clearly became an agenda of labour offices, statistics, census, law and social science. In this respect, it became more clearly defined, distinguished, regulated, codified, and institutionalized. On the other hand, however, the new “work” became an important reference for all kinds of other livelihoods and practices related to it, either as equivalent, similar or opposing. Practices that did not fit smoothly with a notion of normalized work were not simply excluded. Rather, they were compared, reflected and often altered with respect to normalized work, thus remaining disputed and often ambivalent (e.g. housework and service). Consequently, we were able to understand this process more precisely: it established new differences and hierarchies instead of operating simply by exclusion or inclusion.

In the range of possibilities for making a living, *Beruf* or *berufliche Erwerbsarbeit* (vocational employment) became the most predominant reference. It required/promised aptitude and

affinity, training, career, social security, joy and fulfilment and a certain position in society. It was closely related to particular, normalized forms of non-work such as leisure and holidays. In addition, it was linked to the right to receive support in case of sickness, invalidity, retirement or unemployment. This kind of work was established and enforced by laws, social insurance, labour intermediation, vocational counselling for juveniles etc. It became part of concepts of political systems and was manifest in individual representations, e.g. in contrast to unskilled work, to casual work, or to income regarded as a makeshift solution. However, *Beruf* / vocation remained an extraordinary point of reference, not the average case or norm.

Possibilities for finding a livelihood were manifold. Our project's results disclose the persisting importance of family-households both as a guarantor of stability and a unit of production. No complete and comprehensive differentiation was made between household and enterprise. Particularly women made a living in households while many agricultural labourers and journeymen still resided in their employer's household. These practices were only gradually integrated into social insurance systems; some never became subject to such schemes. This variety of livelihoods cannot be excluded from the history of work. Nor can we simply subsume all livelihood practices under the term "work", ignoring the struggles and debates about their character.

People therefore referred to (vocational) work in various manners, consensually as well as by opposition and avoidance. Yet household, family, income, livelihood were also important references. Moreover, work and vocation were closely related but served as competing forms and notions. Their significance thus varied according to the context, such as political propaganda, administration level, law enforcement, census-taking, individual representations etc. Since many aspects were still open and in flux at that time, it would be wrong to assume a (inevitable) linear development towards "work" as the dominant concept.

Historical research has claimed that changes in work and the emergence of a welfare state also influenced relations between individuals/citizens and the state. Citizenship and right of residence gained importance as they were modified. Entitlements (resulting from work or military service etc.) became formalized. In our research, we were able to show the variability in this relationship, how variations in livelihood also constituted different relations to the state. Firstly, because rights and entitlements varied according to livelihoods (and therefore also by gender), administration had a peculiar logic. Secondly, in our analysis, we were also able to confirm how individuals – even those who seemed completely powerless – played a substantial role in administration by claiming, insisting, protesting (on the one hand) or neglecting or avoiding to do so (on the other).

State of the art?

We have gone beyond the state of the art by developing and implementing our research program (and related tools of analysis) as described above. In particular, we examined *how* new social facts were established, and against which forms of livelihood they were established. In doing so, we systematically included competing and controversial notions and forms of work. This approach encompassed both practices that were perceived as novel as well as those perceived as traditional.

For a long time, the history of work (in Europe) was reduced to something regarded as "the core" of working class, mostly male workers. Other forms of work and livelihood were neglected or viewed as "marginal". By contrast, we have included a broad variety of livelihoods ranging from skilled work, civil service, agricultural labour, work in households,

art-making and self-employment, as well as practices that were questioned as work or even regarded as non-work. They were not investigated in isolation but were placed into relation with each other. As a result, all these forms of work, livelihood and non-work reciprocally define each other, changing with and against each other. Not every form of livelihood complied with new notions of work. There was no sudden shift; instead, allegedly traditional forms of livelihood persisted, but they also changed with new prospects.

Moreover, we did not exclusively focus on practices of state, administrations or unions, or exclusively on practices of individuals. We studied them in their mutual relations.

Previous research has described the scientification of the social. This is not merely a matter of knowledge. Rather, we were able to reveal how representations such as unemployment or the labour market were bound to administrative practices of registration, filing and coding.

Our research also verified, in various contexts, how new social categories like work, unemployment and vocation were produced and became practical. Previous research has described how – to focus on just one example – "unemployment" was invented in the late nineteenth century. "Unemployment" did not only emerge as a political or scholarly category referring to those out of work as a result of labour market problems, but – as substantiated in our research – this category was produced and used not only for administrators and policymakers but also for those out of work, searching for it or prosecuted for non-working. Going to a labour office, queuing up, registering, being recognized as involuntarily unemployed, receiving support, possessing a travellers' ID card etc. – all these altered the practical possibilities and self-perceptions of individuals out of work. However, our research also showed the different ways people made use of administration, of new forms of work and related social rights. They could adapt and use these mechanisms but also avoid or refuse them. Inasmuch as people applied, demanded or negotiated, they fundamentally contributed to the administration of work.

[...]