

CFP: Workshop: Work – Employment – Vocation. The Production of Differences and Hierarchies of Livelihood in the 19th and 20th Centuries

Vienna, February 10th to 11th, 2012

Deadline: September 22nd, 2011

There is a multiplicity of ways to earn a livelihood. The variation among terms used for their description indicates the existence of differences and hierarchies between them. In different languages, this spectrum ranges from words for activities which merely organise sustenance, to those for jobs, employment (*emploi*, *Beschäftigung*), and gainful work (*activité lucrative*, *Erwerbsarbeit*) all the way to words for vocations and professions (*métier*, *état*, *profession*). The latter ones designate careers, requiring aptitude, affinity, education and training as well as steadfastness and dedication. In the German-speaking context, they are called *Berufe*. Nonetheless, as indicated by the research literature, it is difficult to translate the term *Beruf* owing to its specific connotations.

Berufe already existed before the 20th century. Different ideas of what they should be coexisted. The idea that a *Beruf* was more and more necessary and crucial for all persons in a given polity – the idea of the “*Beruf* for everyone” – emerged as recently as the first half of the 20th century. Its history was characterised by various struggles in defining and realizing this new universalised institution. The *Beruf* became the most important and legitimate way of organizing a livelihood. It was soon deemed to apply to all citizens, with every occupation becoming a particular case of *Beruf*. Although there still were (and are) diverse possibilities for making a living and the inclusion of some (e.g. housework) was disputed, *Beruf* emerged as the benchmark for their assessment.

Beruf as the most legitimate reference in Austria and Germany featured a variety of interrelated aspects. First, the notion was significant as a comprehensive promise of individual well-being, particularly for men. However, scientists as well as policy-makers and administrators assumed *Beruf* could only be realised after a number of preconditions had been met. Those practicing a *Beruf* needed to have a special disposition and aptitude, one that could be best developed and put into practise within the (very) framework of *Beruf*. In order to achieve individual contentment (emotionally as well as materially), each person would now have to recognise his/her own talents and accordingly, improve his/her skills and capabilities by means of life-long persistent efforts. In this way, *Beruf* was supposed to be the foundation of a career and individual advancement, providing benefits to oneself and one’s family as well as giving one a purpose in life.

Second, *Beruf* was intended to be the guarantor of a successful national economy. National labour-markets were supposed to be multifaceted, differentiated, productive and efficient. They thus required a population (“human capital”) that performed continuously with maximum competence under state coordination. Both a nation’s economic prosperity and its general welfare were assumed to derive from a highly specialised but integrated division of labour. Serving the common good was thus opposed to an anarchic division of labour oriented to self-interest. “*Beruf* for everyone”, which epitomized such objectives, was meant to enhance a nation-state’s position in international competition.

Third, the promises of individual well-being and collective prosperity both produced and conditioned one another. General welfare as well as self-fulfilment were understood to be served best when everyone practised their appropriate *Beruf*. In addition, the application of scientific methods was thought to be the most effective instrument for recognizing one's aptitude for a specific *Beruf*, to be further developed in centrally supervised vocational education and training, capable of producing highly competent *Berufsträger* (i.e. those who have a *Beruf*). In the framework of the official labour-market, such persons might then pursue their personal interests in order "to get somewhere", i.e. to advance in their careers. Public labour-market administration contributed significantly to normalising *Beruf*, e.g. by codifying vocational qualifications; these in turn evolved into formal requirements to be attained by everyone striving toward a *Beruf*. Furthermore, this system regulated and sought to homogenise access to *Berufe*, thereby formally differentiating livelihoods into *Beruf* and non-*Beruf*.

When exploring the history of official attempts to establish "*Beruf* for everyone" in the nation, it is also important to take historical struggles into account, in which *youth* was established as a generally practised phase of life. Viewed as the future of the nation-state, young people became the most key target-group for vocational policies. Administrators and politicians systematically promoted vocational education and training. Vocational counselling was instituted for more and more young persons, with the objective of becoming scientifically grounded and both educationally and economically oriented. Paradoxically, the world economic crisis of the 1930s contributed to the establishment of *youth* and *Beruf*. In this period of high unemployment, *Beruf* became more widely acknowledged than ever. Many citizens had – and all were supposed to have – obtained a *Beruf* even when they were without employment. As a consequence, *Beruf* went above and beyond work.

In Austria, these objectives culminated in the Austro-Fascist efforts to enforce the *Berufsständische Ordnung*. Within that order, one's vocation became decisive for one's place within the state. Such efforts, however, were by and large a failure. Not only were policy-makers, official institutions, political and economic organisations and trade associations involved in the struggles to establish *Beruf* but also individuals who in any way received and/or organised a livelihood. They participated by accepting new offers and requirements, by making an effort to attain a life-long vocation (*Lebensberuf*) – or by instead doing something different, such as pursuing long-standing opportunities like farm or domestic service or new ones like unskilled labour and leisure time. A history of *Beruf* cannot be written if the manifold ways people sustained and altered their livelihoods are omitted.

The workshop will therefore deal with the question of how legitimate references of labour markets, such as *Beruf*, were historically produced and established.

At the workshop, questions such as the following should be addressed:

- Can similar struggles to establish a legitimate reference be found in places other than the German-speaking states? Are there terms that functionally correspond to *Beruf*? Which differences can be identified when making comparisons?
- How were legitimate references put into practice in national labour-markets? To what extent were these successful? Which institutions and organisations were contributing factors (either by consensus or dissent)? How did those persons who now had (or were supposed to have) a *Beruf* support or counteract these changes?
- What role was played by (changes to) vocational education and training systems?
- How did the establishment of legitimate references counter other ways of finding sustenance? Or put differently (in the case of *Beruf*): which activities became non-*Beruf* (like

family and leisure time) or anti-*Beruf* (such as illegal activities practised as a vocation on a continual basis, e.g. *Berufsverbrechertum*)? How did different activities come together in efforts at vocationalisation (or professionalisation)?

- Which official taxonomies were applied to describe (and thus to produce) labour-markets by employment and occupational statistics on national and international levels, for example?

The workshop is organised by the ERC-starting grant project “The Production of Work: Welfare, Labour-Market, and the Disputed Boundaries of Labour (1880-1938)”, directed by Sigrid Wadauer. For more information on the project, see the homepage <http://pow.univie.ac.at>.

The project will cover travelling expenses and accommodations for invited participants.

Contributors should submit presentation papers before the start of the conference.

Abstracts not exceeding 2 pages and a short CV should be submitted to pow.wiso@univie.ac.at.

The Production of Work
Department of Economic and Social History
University of Vienna

Maria-Theresien-Straße 9/4
1090 Vienna
Austria

Phone: +43-1-4277-41337
<http://pow.univie.ac.at/>