

Call for Abstracts

International Conference

**Rethinking the Future of Work:
Competing Perspectives and Methodological Challenges**

27-28 April 2018

Institute of Research University of Bucharest/ICUB, Social Science Division

There is a general assumption that development of sophisticated robotics and artificial intelligence (AI), machine-learning, nanotechnology, 3D printing, biotechnology, etc. will undermine the existence of the work, labour market and employment as we know it. In a growing number of writings by social scientists, economic futurists, technology visionaries, activists, union leaders, and public officials, the future of work is imagined in scenarios ranging from dystopia to utopia and through a plurality of perspectives. At one end of the spectre, there are positive approaches in which machines are subordinated to human needs and take over the monotonous jobs allowing humans to pursue more creative pursuits, working hours fall, wages rise, and productivity gains are re-distributed according to the principles of fairness and justice. At the another end of the spectre, there are approaches projecting a jobless future, with humans as annexes to machines, with a high-skilled technological elite *versus* a global army of unemployed and large sections of humanity struggling with economic and social redundancy. Between these competing visions are those who advance concomitantly several scenarios of possible futures, trying to see in which one the people will have the 'right resilience' to go through the crisis of work.

Although there is a great deal of uncertainty about the future of work, this future has already started by now. There is a rise in the number of zerohours contracts and new modes of employment, such as the 'gig', 'sharing', or 'platform' economies, contracting independent workers for short-term engagements. Also, there is a rise of the so-called 'creative jobs' as an alternative to unemployment, in which people rely on self-entrepreneurial skills and 'pleasure in work' by unleashing uniquely personal creative capacities. Positive, 'Davos style', discourses see in these changes a high degree of autonomy and flexibility for the worker, a liberation from the 9-to-5, a 'free-lance economy', a 'capitalisation on talent' and a growth centred on creativity, while critical approaches of labour show that these changes involve a substantial degree of precariousness and insecurity, and blurring of the traditional boundaries home/work, night/day, labour/free time, etc.

However, different visions on the future of work rely implicitly on the normative idea of decent work with a fulltime and long-term employment as a source of income, a way of social interaction, a way of structuring the everyday existence of the individual and a source of self-esteem. The approaches which see in the future of work new opportunities for 'capitalisation on the talent' still use work as the means through which individuals are expected to realize themselves and to gain access to social recognition. The recent critical theories of labour also depend on the normative concept of work, which allows seeing and mapping the precariousness, insecurity and social redundancy.

For the society at large, work continues to be seen as central for solving most of the problems through calls for higher wages and the right to work, the promises of 'more jobs' made by politicians, and through attacks on immigrants 'stealing jobs'. Unemployment is still

considered a temporary state within the context of a conventional labour market. Those who do not succeed in having a job or in ‘self-entrepreneurship from home’ are required to attribute the fault to his/her incapacity to ‘sell’ himself/herself successfully on the market. The work is rarely seen as a problem in itself, thus, the main aim of this conference is to problematize the notion of work and to rethink it from the perspective of the future of work, by exploring a cluster of interrelated questions.

Questions: What does the ‘future of work’ mean and why is there such an interest in anticipating this particular future? Does the future of work stand for the future in general? What are the risks and methodological limits in researching the future of work? What will be the transformations in the world of work, what anxieties and possibilities will they produce? In the future, will work disappear or will become a privilege for few? Could and should the underlying persistence of the normativity of work be avoided in thinking the future of work? Can we rethink work beyond the cult of success, recognition and personal achievement? What lessons do historical and contemporary social movements against work and the claims of the ‘right to be lazy’ provide for the future of work? What are the skills most likely to be in demand in the future, and how should the existing education system adjust to the future of work? What are the new competencies and skills that social sciences in particular can provide in order to meet the demands of automation? What are the responsibilities of social sciences in constructing the future of work?

Themes: We invite contributions to answer these questions and/or to address the following topics, although the list is by no means exhaustive: histories of the philosophy of work; theories of value and work; work and recognition; classical economic debates about work; disappearance and relocation of jobs; precariousness and ‘precariat’; ‘gig economy’ and new models of employment; methodological aspects of approaching the future of work; designs and proposals for a post-work society; work and the idea of universal basic income.

The above questions and topics are not intended to set strict boundaries, but to facilitate open and thematically wide-ranging discussions. The conference wants to be an opportunity for an open, interdisciplinary discussion of the problems and questions surrounding the future of work.

Keynote speakers:

Guy Standing (SOAS University of London & BIEN, tbc)
Anselm Jappe (Accademia di Belle Arti, Sassari & EHESS, Paris)
Ruth Yeoman (Oxford University)
Norbert Trenkle (*Krisis* Group)
Roubini Gropas (EPSC, European Commission)

Organizational details: Please submit proposals of 300-500 words abstract for a 20-minute presentation by **15 December 2017**, to tamara.caraus@icub.unibuc.ro. Please also indicate your name, professional status and institutional affiliation. Decision notices will be emailed by **10 January 2018**. Please note that there is no participation fee.

Scientific committee of the conference:

Mircea Dumitru (Faculty of Philosophy, University of Bucharest)
Laurentiu Leustean (Institute of Research University of Bucharest/ICUB)

Marian Preda (Faculty of Sociology and Social Work, University of Bucharest)
Sanja Multinovici Bojanic (Center for Advanced Studies, University of Rijeka, Croatia)
Petar Bojanic (Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory, Belgrade, Serbia)
Marian Zulean (SSS-ICUB)