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PROJECT

In Search of Sustainable Work

Work has been a latecomer to sustainability debates, and it remains unclear what sustainability exactly means in relation to work. Whereas trade unions and labor studies used to focus on the individual and social sustainability of work (in the sense of work that does not endanger the physical and mental health of workers and may contribute to their well-being), another understanding that asks how work relates to ecological sustainability (in the sense of the contribution of work to climate warming, pollution, and loss of biodiversity) is gaining importance. How do these two understandings interrelate? And can work be sustainable at all in a growth- and profit-oriented capitalist economy?

Based on an empirical examination of initiatives claiming to pursue social and ecological sustainability in the sphere of work, the project aims to contribute to a critical conceptualization of sustainable work.

Recommended Reading

Renard, Léa, and Bénédicte Zimmermann. "'Gute Arbeit' und 'qualité de vie au travail': Kategorisierungsprozesse im deutsch-französischen Vergleich." *Berliner Journal für Soziologie* 30, nos. 3–4 (2020): 421–451.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11609-021-00432-y>.

Herzog, Lisa, Katrin Sold, and Bénédicte Zimmermann. "Essential Work: A Category in the Making?" In *Shifting Categories of Work: Unsettling the Ways We Think about Jobs, Labor and Activities*, edited by Lisa Herzog and Bénédicte Zimmermann, 252–264. London: Routledge, 2022.

Herzog, Lisa, and Bénédicte Zimmermann, eds. *Shifting Categories of Work: Unsettling the Ways We Think about Jobs, Labor and Activities*. London: Routledge, 2022.

"Gute Arbeit", "qualité de vie au travail": Are there national standards for good jobs?

For two decades, international organizations like the ILO and the European Commission have been promoting a qualitative approach to work, as a complement to the quantitative one driven by the aim of full employment that prevailed until then. While the ILO promoted the concept of "decent work", the European Commission turned that into the claim for "better jobs", subdivided into "quality of employment" and "quality in work", a key piece of the European social agenda.

On the national level, France and Germany fed the debate, making better jobs a matter of public concern. But whereas "gute Arbeit" is the keyword for it in Germany, "qualité de vie au travail" is the one in France. Can we take for granted that these key words address the same kind of issue, beyond the fact that they both fall under the common umbrella of the English-language concept of "better" or "good" jobs?

The issue is not just a matter of linguistic translation, but of categorization and valuation. Words are part of a process of labeling and categorizing social reality. Therefore, lexical differences are more than just about words; they involve a series of presuppositions about work and workers that are rooted in institutional and socio-political configurations. In the present case, they also involve valuations of what "good" or "quality" should mean in relation to jobs and work.

The aim of the talk is to address the meaning of "gute Arbeit" and "qualité de vie au travail" by giving insight into the contrasted processes of categorization involved. For this purpose, I will rely on some very preliminary results of a French-German ANR/DFG research project on workers' capabilities for professional development in French and German sites of multinational groups.

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

external publication list

(<http://centregeorgsimmel.ehess.fr/en/membres/membres-statutaires/benedicte-zimmermann/>)

Zimmermann, Bénédicte (New York,2023)

Shifting categories of work : unsettling the ways we think about jobs, labor, and activities

<https://kxp.k1oplus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=1823912389>

Zimmermann, Bénédicte (Leiden,2021)

Close comparison in a global world : categorizing the quality of work in a multinational company

<https://kxp.k1oplus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=1794176039>

Zimmermann, Bénédicte (Paris,2021)

Agie ou latente? : médiation tierce et production de la confiance en entreprise

<https://kxp.k1oplus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=1770062173>

Zimmermann, Bénédicte (Brussels,2021)

Systems theory and algorithmic futures : interview with Elena Esposito

<https://kxp.k1oplus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=1770060669>

Zimmermann, Bénédicte (Paris,2021)

Les médiations institutionnelles de la confiance en entreprise : une comparaison franco-allemande

<https://kxp.k1oplus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=1758156368>

Zimmermann, Bénédicte (Paris,2020)

Capabilités et développement de l'individualité

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Zimmermann, Bénédicte (Wiesbaden,2020)

“Gute Arbeit“ und “qualité de vie au travail“ : Kategorisierungsprozesse im deutsch-französischen Vergleich

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Zimmermann, Bénédicte (Paris,2020)

Gute Arbeit and qualité de vie au travail

<https://kxp.k1oplus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=1744572690>

Zimmermann, Bénédicte (Paris,2020)

Promouvoir la socio-économie et "L'art de la théorie sociale" : entretien avec Richard Swedberg

<https://kxp.k1oplus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=1725501732>

Zimmermann, Bénédicte (2018)

Sécuriser les parcours par le compte : formation continue, droits subjectifs et politiques de la singularité

<https://kxp.k1oplus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=1046422154>