

Call for Sessions - WEHC 2015 [S20080]

Proposed title of the session

Divisions of work across the life course: Practices and attitudes in global economic historical perspective

Abstract

The concept of the life cycle has played an important role in economic as well as in sociological theory since the mid-twentieth century. Modigliani's "life cycle hypothesis of saving" puts the emphasis on saving and spending over the life course and its meaning for individual thrift as well as for the wealth of nations. The concept was closely linked to the sociological concept of the "institutionalization" of the life course and its "tripartite" division into stages of education/training, work, and retirement. Since the 1980s population ageing and demographic change have come into play, and research on the "economic life cycle" (R.D. Lee) concentrates on flows of resources between more or less productive or dependent life cycle stages.

Economic and sociological reasoning of this kind is the starting point of the session; some papers will present recent research in that field. However, the session wants to add further historical and global dimensions. The concepts mentioned above refer to developed industrial societies, to post-transitional demographic and family structures, and to modern affluent states with considerable public transfers between social groups and generations. Such conditions are hardly found in human history before the twentieth century and even today they are not typical for much of the world.

A major aim of the session is, therefore, to include research and theoretical reasoning on pre- and early industrial societies as well as on non-European regions. This requires, firstly, a wide understanding of work: The session concerns age-specific allocations to activities, which may or may not be regarded as "work", e.g. work for subsistence, gainful employment, volunteering, housework and care work. It includes various types of labour relations, such as free and unfree labour, wage labour and self-employment; and changing positions in the labour process, such as subordinated, managerial or executive. Secondly, this also requires a close look at the interrelations between divisions of work and various global and historical household and family patterns. Particular emphasis will be given to combinations of various forms of work and to their variations across the individual life course and the family life cycle.

The main methodological aim of the session is to encourage a dialogue between macro- and micro-levels of analysis, and between structural approaches and the analysis of attitudes and preferences. The session will employ a global historical perspective, that is sensitive to comparisons and connections between different regions of the world. The session will include papers on Europe, North and South America, Africa, China, Japan and South East Asia.

Themes will include recent age-specific public transfers and flows among generations in Europe; comparative analysis of the distribution of work and leisure across the life course since 1800; age-specific labour migration in South Asia since the 1980s; "work biographies" in late colonial and early independent Africa; the impact of the reconstruction of private and public spheres on age- and gender-specific divisions of work in Japan and South-East Asia; women's work and the life cycle in medieval North Africa; divisions of labour in slave and freed-slave communities in 19th-century Brazil.

I. Corresponding Session Organiser

Prof. Andreas Eckert (Humboldt University Berlin [Germany])

II. Co-Organiser(s)

1. Corresponding Organiser.
2. Prof. Josef Ehmer (University of Vienna [Austria])

III. Expected Participant(s)

1. same as correspondent.
2. Josef Ehmer (University of Vienna [Austria])
3. Mahua Sarkar (Binghamton University [United States of America])
4. Henrique Espada Lima (Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina [Brazil])
5. Karen Hofmeester (International Institute for Social History, Amsterdam [Netherlands])
6. Ju Li (Central European University Budapest [Hungary])
7. Alexia Frnkranz (Technical University Vienna [Austria])
8. Ochiai Emiko (Kyoto University [Japan])
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