



Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin

INSTITUTE FOR ADVANCED STUDY

Working Futures
International Conference on “Past Futures of Work”
12-13 May 2022
Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin

Call for Papers
Deadline for submission: 22 January 2022

Workshop Theme

Debates about the “future of work” have picked up speed in recent years, triggered not only by the digital transformation as such, but also by the shifts in working practices during the Corona virus pandemic. But the “future of work” has long been a topic that fascinated economists, sociologists, and philosophers, and it has been a topic of broader political and cultural discussions already in the past. While some thinkers predicted dystopian scenarios, e.g., mass unemployment and subjection to all-powerful machines, others hoped for improvements, e.g., radically shortened working hours. Yet others started practical experiments, such as utopian settlements with integrated working communities. Some of these were part of broader ideological frameworks, e.g., the kibbutzim, while others focused specifically on organizing work differently.

Returning to such “Past futures of work” helps to contextualize and historicize the current debates about the future of work. For example, in what ways are current criticisms of algorithms “taking over” certain jobs comparable to similar worries about machines or robots in the past? Does the fact that predictions about mass unemployment have turned out to be incorrect say anything about current developments? What fears and anxieties, what hopes and desires about work, are expressed in these past schemes? To what extent were these schemes gendered and/or racialized, how did they relate to the colonial practices of the day? What notions of the meaning of work in human life are implicit or explicit in them?

After an initial workshop on these themes in October 2021, we plan to hold a second workshop with an open call for papers in May 2022. This time, we want to focus in particular on examples and cases studies of “past futures of work” from around the globe, e.g. from a comparative perspective. Possible topics include not only discussions of the future of work in the history of economic and sociological thought, but also in literary and other cultural expressions. We are also interested in presentations about concrete “real utopias” (E.O. Wright) of alternative forms of work, including their governance structures, underlying world views, and reasons for success or failure. Moreover, utopias or dystopias about the future of work are often connected to assumptions about education, skills, and human character that are worth unearthing.

Keynote speakers include

Prof. Dr. Michel Lallement, professor of sociology at the Conservatoire national des arts et métiers (CNAM) in Paris, research affiliation with Lise-CNRS

Prof. Dr. Blanche Segrestin, professor at MINES Paris-Tech and head of the Center of Management Science

Format

Hybrid or fully in person (Corona situation allowing).

Accommodation and travel costs will be covered for participants in the conference.

Submission

Please submit an **abstract** of 800-1000 words, and a **biographical sketch** of 200 words, including a **link to your full CV** and **list of publications** to the following address: pastfuturesofwork@wiko-berlin.de

Deadline for submission: **January 22, 2022**

Conveners

The international research network *Working Futures*¹ is hosted by the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin and led by Prof. Dr. Andreas Eckert, Prof. Dr. Lisa Herzog, and Prof. Dr. Bénédicte Zimmermann. This network, which has existed since 2018, meets twice per year (digitally during the Corona pandemic) to bring together researchers from various disciplines and countries who work on various aspects of the past, the present and the future of work.

¹ <https://www.wiko-berlin.de/institution/initiativen-kooperationen/working-futures>