

WORCK

Historicising Coercive Social Processes

WORCK Conference, 5–7 September 2023

Masaryk Institute and Archives of the Czech Academy of Sciences, Prague

You are invited to submit your paper to the conference “Historicising Coercive Social Processes”, the capstone event of COST action project WORCK (Worlds of Related Coercion in Work) funded by the Horizon Europe programme of the European Union. The conference will take place at the Faculty of Arts of Charles University in Prague on 5–7 September 2023.

Concept

Legal philosopher Alan Wertheimer wrote that “our understanding of coercion underlies... our view of various social practices”. The opposite also holds true: Researching social relations in a given historical context is essential for understanding how coercion underpins the organisation of production, the administration of punishment, and interpersonal relations in conditions of power asymmetry. In turn, social practices can only be understood within processes such as valorisation, im/mobilisation, and punishment that converge to create the historical dimension within which we understand those practices.

Moving on beyond a research agenda that seeks to posit a dichotomy between free and unfree labour or design a spectrum of scalar shades of coercion between the opposite poles of freedom and unfreedom, the WORCK network has attempted to understand how practices and processes of labour coercion can illuminate social practices (and vice versa) at specific historical junctures and in various geographical settings.

The final conference seeks to bring together scholars conducting empirical research on such practices and processes, as well as on the perspectives of historical actors and how they were entangled in social asymmetries. We welcome submissions from participants at any stage of their career, including doctoral students and independent scholars. Our aim is to attract researchers from the entire spectrum of social sciences and humanities who study labour coercion with historical perspectives in a variety of disciplines.

We are open to any contribution addressing the history of coercive social processes, including but not limited to:

1. Remuneration, valorisation, indebtedness
2. Violence, retribution, chastisement
3. Punishment and labour relations
4. Entangled spaces, coercive network
5. Conceptualising coercion: Methods and ontologies

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6. Conflict, negotiation, autonomy
7. Paternalism in the household and on the shop floor
8. Environment, work, and coercion

About the WORCK network

Over the past three years, WORCK has attempted to bridge gaps between the specialised but hitherto often separate subfields of labour history, global history, colonial history, and feminist history, creating an academic space that cuts across standard research fields. WORCK enables exchange between scholars working on topics as varied as construction work in ancient civilisations; indentured work and sharecropping in rural societies; chattel slavery and coolie work; debt bondage, convict labour, and military impressment; coercive mechanisms in household work and wage labour; precariousness and modern forms of casualisation.

By studying the persistence and transformation of coercion across gender orders, geographies, and historical eras, WORCK has shifted the focus of labour history. Neither the male breadwinner model nor the free wage labourer or the capitalist mode of production can provide a comprehensive blueprint for this endeavour. Instead, WORCK has striven to attain a deeper understanding of the mechanisms of coercion in all work relations throughout history.

WORCK comprises four working groups: Grammars of Coercion; Sites and Fields of Coercion, (Im)mobilisation of the Workforce, and Intersecting Marginalities. The research undertaken in each of these groups has transformed our understanding of the stories of work and production and their entanglement with violence, expropriation, and marginalisation. For more information, visit www.worck.eu.

Submission process

We welcome individual papers as well as full panel proposals.

Individual papers: Please send a 300–500 word abstract together with information on your academic title (e.g., PhD student), affiliation (if any), and country to conference@worck.eu by 1 February 2023.

Panels: Panels should be composed of 3 to 5 papers. Please send a rationale for the panel, an abstract (300–500 words) for each paper, and information about the presenters to conference@worck.eu by 1 February 2023.

The COST action will cover travel expenses for active participants in the conference according to the COST travel reimbursement rules,

Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the conference committee at the address provided above.