

Herausgegeben vom
Institut für Ost- und
Südosteuropaforschung

IOS



Südost- Forschungen

Band 72 • 2013

DE GRUYTER
OLDENBOURG

The Fluid Boundaries of “Work”. Some Considerations regarding Concepts, Approaches, and South-Eastern Europe

STEFANO PETRUNGARO (Regensburg)

In recent decades labour history has been profoundly revised. The field traditionally covered by the history of the workers' movement has expanded to include gender, cultural, transnational and global perspectives.¹ Furthermore, it underlined the historical relevance of a wide range of occupations which hitherto had not been fully explored. Indeed, one may now read that the “classical”, i.e. industrial proletariat was always “surrounded by, and intermingled with, a variegated ‘semi-proletariat’ of peddlers, sharecroppers, domestic workers, prostitutes, self-employed workers, beggars and scavengers”.² It is quite a heterogeneous amalgam of professions and social protagonists, which has therefore come to be known as a “multiversum” of work and of workers: a category which proves very useful for analyzing historical contexts which may be geographically and temporarily distant from one another.³

¹ Lenard R. BERLANSTEIN (ed.), *Rethinking Labor History. Essays on Discourse and Class Analysis*. Urbana/IL et al. 1993; Lex HEERMA VAN VOSS/Marcel VAN DER LINDEN (eds.), *Class and Other Identities. Gender, Religion and Ethnicity in the Writing of European Labour History*. New York, Oxford 2002; Joan ALLEN/Alan CAMPBELL/John MCILROY (eds.), *Histories of Labour. National and International Perspectives*. With a Preface by Eric Hobsbawm. Pontypool 2010; Marcel VAN DER LINDEN/Eva HIMMELSTOSS (eds.), *Grenzenüberschreitende Arbeitergeschichte. Konzepte und Erkundungen. Labour History Beyond Borders. Concepts and Explorations*. Leipzig 2010.

² Marcel VAN DER LINDEN, *Globalizing Labour Historiography. The Amsterdam Approach*, in: Josef EHMER/Helga GREBING/Peter GUTSCHNER (eds.), “Arbeit”. *Geschichte – Gegenwart – Zukunft*. Leipzig 2002, 151-164, 159.

³ See for example Karl Heinz ROTH/Marcel VAN DER LINDEN, *Ergebnisse und Perspektive*, in: DIES. (eds.), *Über Marx hinaus. Arbeitsgeschichte und Arbeitsbegriff in der Konfrontation mit den globalen Arbeitsverhältnissen des 21. Jahrhunderts*. Berlin 2009, 557-599; a relevant thematization of the “heterogeneity” of the “(global) working class” we are referring to, is the influent work by Peter LINEBAUGH/Marcus REDIKER, *The Many-Headed Hydra. Sailors, Slaves, Commoners and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic*. Boston 2001.

This has to do with criticism expressed since the 1970s towards the notion of “working class”, and which had relevant repercussions for historiography.⁴ It is not by accident that those occupations mentioned in the quotation above to a large extent form that *Lumpenproletariat* to whom Marx and Engels refused to give the status of “class”.⁵ Neither “proleters” nor “workers” in the strictest sense, they are historical actors to be found on the margins of the world of labour, members of what has increasingly come to be defined as “non-work”. This category is indeed ever more frequently used by sociologists and other scholars in the humanities, generally referring to the “precarious” labour relations typical of this present moment in time.

Within the framework of a discussion on the “multiversum” of work, that being the variegated nature of the world of workers, one needs to focus more on the category of “non-work”, as well as those which are analogous and partially overlapping, such as the “informal economy”.⁶ How does one “call” what is considered on the margins of the field of “work”, i.e. of socially, legally, administratively, economically recognized work? To “call” already means to “define”, and this means that the analysis has already been started. The question therefore becomes: how to “study” the boundaries of work? The considerations which follow have been inspired by the interdisciplinary panorama of existing studies, with the aim of focusing on historiographical issues in particular.

Furthermore, one must question the contribution which research on South-Eastern Europe could provide to the international debate. It may well be a way to investigate the labour history of this region with an updated approach, while at the same time establishing a dialogue with similar research already under way in relation to other geographical areas.

1. What Is there Outside of “Work”?

Let us begin with “non-work”: in order to understand what is considered as “non-work” in a given period, in any given place or social context, one needs to know what is in those same circumstances considered as “work”. As it is known, the meaning which

⁴ BERLANSTEIN (ed.), *Rethinking Labor History*; Patrick JOYCE (ed.), *The Oxford Reader on Class*. Oxford 1995; Geoff ELEY / Keith NIELD (eds.), *The Future of Class in History. What's Left of the Social?* Ann Arbor 2007; VAN DER LINDEN / ROTH (eds.), *Über Marx hinaus*.

⁵ See the considerable list of the members of the *Lumpenproletariat* in: Karl MARX, *Der achtzehnte Brumaire des Louis Bonaparte*, in: IDEM / Friedrich ENGELS, *Werke*, Bd. 8. Berlin 1960, 160f.; cfr. Gianluca SOLLA, *Memoria dei senza nome. Breve storia dell'infimo e dell'infame*. Verona 2013, esp. 26-48; Max HENNINGER, *Armut, Arbeit. Entwicklung. Zur Kritik der Marx'schen Begriffbestimmungen*, in: ROTH / VAN DER LINDEN (eds.), *Über Marx hinaus*, 335-362.

⁶ The reflections which follow greatly benefit from a workshop organized at the Institute for East and Southeast European Studies in Regensburg: “Nicht-Arbeit”: multidisziplinäre Auseinandersetzungen mit einer analytischen Kategorie (11.10.2013). I would like to thank all the participants for their inspiring contributions, as well as Edvin Pezo and Konrad Clewing for their comments on a previous version of this text.

is socially, culturally, legislatively ascribed to “work” depends on – and greatly varies within – historical periods and their own varying social and geographical contexts. While there do exist many remarkable general historical overviews on the topic of “work”,⁷ very few comparable works have been written with regard to its negation.⁸

Restricting the reflection to the modern age (the 19th and 20th centuries), and beyond the specific term, the “negation” of work – that is, something not considered to be “proper” work – needed to deal with the “formalization” of work in Europe, the development of industrial capitalism of the 19th century. During these political-economic developments, Western European countries first of all established a “norm”, linked to salaried employment, whose ideal type was industrial wage work, the embodiment of labour relations which have become “normal”. What took place between the 19th and the 20th century was thus a “codification” of work, which attempted to determine the borders of the latter.⁹

With regards to this model, i.e. forms of normalized work, there have always been infinite “deviations”, some of which undergoing a further process of formalization. Thus was modern “unemployment” born, another notion which arose at the same time with codification of “work” in the late 19th century: it is a formalization of a precise professional inactivity, whose juridical boundaries have constantly changed, and it has an own history in the legislative field, in administrative practices and in statistics.¹⁰

⁷ For example: Werner CONZE, Arbeit, in: Otto BRUNNER/W. CONZE/Reinhardt KOSELLECK (eds.), *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, vol. 1. Stuttgart 1972, 154-215; Maurice GODELIER, Lavoro, in: *Enciclopedia Einaudi*, vol. 8. Torino 1979, 31-82; Patrick JOYCE (ed.), *The Historical Meanings of Work*. Cambridge 1987; George JOCHUM, Zur historischen Entwicklung des Verständnisses von Arbeit, in: Gerd-Günter Voss / Fritz BÖHLE / Günther WACHTLER (eds.), *Handbuch Arbeitssoziologie*. Wiesbaden 2010, 81-125; Manfred BIERWISCH (ed.), *Die Rolle der Arbeit in verschiedenen Epochen und Kulturen*. Bonn 2003.

⁸ I know of no historical surveys regarding the concept of “non-work”; there are a few studies about the “unemployment” understood in a broader sense and approached with a *longue durée* perspective, like: John A. GARRATY, *Unemployment in History. Economic Thought and Public Policy*. New York 1978; Yves ZOBEMAN, *Une histoire du chômage. De l’antiquité à nos jours*. Paris 2011.

⁹ Sebastian CONRAD / Elisio MACAMO / Bénédicte ZIMMERMANN, Die Kodifizierung der Arbeit. Individuum, Gesellschaft, Nation, in: Jürgen KOCKA / Klaus OFFE (eds.), *Geschichte und Zukunft der Arbeit*. Frankfurt/M. 1999, 449-475; Robert CASTEL, *From Manual Workers to Wage Laborers. Transformation of the Social Question*. New Brunswick 2003 (1995); Peter GUTSCHNER, Von der Norm zur Normalität? Begriff und Bedeutung von Arbeit im Diskurs der Neuzeit, in: EHMER / GREBING / GUTSCHNER (eds.), “Arbeit”, 137-148.

¹⁰ Christian TOPALOV, *Naissance du chômeur. 1880-1910*. Paris 1994; Bénédicte ZIMMERMANN, Arbeitslosigkeit in Deutschland. Zur Entstehung einer sozialen Kategorie. Frankfurt/M. 2006; Sigrid WADAUER, Establishing Distinctions. Unemployment versus Vagrancy in Austria from the Late Nineteenth Century to 1938, *International Review of Social History* 56 (2011), 31-70; Manfredi ALBERTI, La “scoperta” dei disoccupati. Alle origini dell’indagine statistica sulla disoccupazione nell’Italia liberale (1893-1915). Firenze 2013.

Similarly, “free time” was defined as a field which was clearly distinct from the working one.¹¹ Moreover, related notions such as “idleness” have changed and renewed over the last two centuries,¹² while modern voluntary work has developed, for example in the social field.¹³ One further, extreme form of “anomalous” work is forced labour, which in recent times has increasingly attracted the attention of scholars.¹⁴

The definition of “formalized” work – and its consequent distinction from all the “rest” – was linked to the birth of the modern welfare state, signifying, among other things, the introduction of social insurance, health insurance, rent insurance, etc.¹⁵ At the same time modern labour law, and the modern workers’ representative system, i.e. the trade unions, came into being.¹⁶ These developments were closely bound with certain precise forms of work, above all that of the industrial wage. The formalization of certain labour relations brought to the automatic exclusion, from a legislative and administrative perspective, and often from the point of view of common opinion, of all other “activities”, which were related to a wide and vague field of “non-work”, especially

¹¹ The investigation of “free time”, moving from pioneering works such as those by Peter BURKE, *The Invention of Leisure in Early Modern Europe, Past & Present* (February 1995), 136-150, and Alain CORBIN (ed.), *L’invenzione del tempo libero, 1850-1960*. Roma, Bari 1996, gave voice to a wide historiographical and interdisciplinary research field: David HARRIS, *Key Concepts in Leisure Studies*. London 2005; John M. JENKINS / John J. PIGRAM (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Leisure and Outdoor Recreation*. London 2003; Chris Rojek / Susan M. SHAW / A. J. VEAL (eds.), *A Handbook of Leisure Studies*. Houndmills 2006; Orvar LÖFGREN, *On Holiday. A History of Vacationing*. Berkeley/CA, Los Angeles, London 1999; Rudy KOSHAR (ed.), *Histories of Leisure*. Oxford 2002.

¹² For a useful introduction: Wolfgang SCHNEIDER, *Die Enzyklopädie der Faulheit. Ein Anleitungsbuch*. Berlin 2003; for an inquiry into the literary problematizations of inactivity: Leonhard FUEST, *Poetik des Nicht(s)tuns. Verweigerungsstrategien in der Literatur seit 1800*. München 2008.

¹³ Annette ZIMMER / Stefan NÄHRLICH (eds.), *Engagierte Bürgerschaft. Traditionen und Perspektiven*. Wiesbaden 2000; Sabine HERING / Berteke WAALDIJK (eds.), *Helfer der Armen – Hüter der Öffentlichkeit. Die Wohlfahrtsgeschichte Osteuropas 1900-1960*. Opladen, Farmington Hills/MI 2006.

¹⁴ Hans-Christoph SEIDEL / Klaus TENFELDE (eds.), *Zwangsarbeit im Europa des 20. Jahrhunderts. Bewältigung und vergleichende Aspekte*. Essen 2007; and the series “Forced Labour in Mining Industries during the First and Second World Wars” published by the Institute for Social Movements in Bochum.

¹⁵ For the general development of the welfare state in Europe and the USA: Peter FLORA / Arnold J. HEIDENHEIMER (eds.), *The Development of Welfare States in Europe and America*. New Brunswick et al. 1981; Jens ALBER, *Vom Armenhaus zum Wohlfahrtsstaat. Analysen zur Entwicklung der Sozialversicherung in Westeuropa*. Frankfurt/M. et al. 1982; Gerhard A. RITTER, *Der Sozialstaat. Entstehung und Entwicklung im internationalen Vergleich*. München³2010; in general: *The Oxford Handbook of the Welfare State*. Oxford 2010.

¹⁶ For a survey on these topics: Geoff ELEY, *Forging Democracy. The History of the Left in Europe, 1850-2000*. Oxford 2002.

if they were non-continuative activities, without a regular income or any remuneration, not clearly defined through working times, and not bound to a workplace.¹⁷

But quite soon such rigid dichotomies between what was conceived as “work” and its “Other” began to be criticized, above all by the spokespersons of the feminist movement.¹⁸ It is in this context and certainly not by chance that even in academic literature the use of the notion of “non-work” was no longer episodic but frequent and reasoned.¹⁹ These intellectuals gave form to a criticism toward the ideology of the “male breadwinner” and the lack of “acknowledgment” of domestic labour as an integral and crucial element of the family and social economy. In order to express the combination of generative, (re)productive and domestic “tasks”, the tendency was nonetheless to use expressions such as “housework” and “subsistence work”.²⁰

During the second half of the 20th century, and stemming in particular from the economic crisis of the 1970s, this awareness has heightened, both in the humanities and the social sciences, with regard to the fallacy of a neat distinction between “work” and “non-work”. Attention has shifted progressively from the factory towards society, and from wage work towards the dense interaction of numerous typologies of economic activities, official and unofficial, formal and informal. It is a significant number of factors that has determined, all along, the functioning of a family economy, which has led to speaking of “makeshift economies”, i.e. patchworks of quite different incomes.²¹

¹⁷ The research traditions, above all sociological, of labour studies were also built on the basis of this hegemonic form of “work”: Gerd-Günter VOSS, *Arbeit als Grundlage menschlicher Existenz: Was ist Arbeit? Zum Problem eines allgemeinen Arbeitsbegriffs*, in: IDEM / BÖHLE / WACHTLER (eds.), *Handbuch Arbeitssoziologie*, 23-80.

¹⁸ Eileen YEO, *Gender in Labour and Working-Class History*, in: VAN VOSS / VAN DER LINDEN (eds.), *Class and Other Identities*, 73-87; Linda NIERLING, *Die Anerkennung von “Arbeit” in der Erwerbsarbeit und der Nicht-Erwerbsarbeit*, in: Gerrit HERLYN / Johannes MÜSKE / Klaus SCHÖNBERGER / Ove SUTTER (eds.), *Arbeit und Nicht-Arbeit. Entgrenzungen und Begrenzungen von Lebensbereichen und Praxen*. Mering 2009, 283-295.

¹⁹ For some examples from the Anglophone area, which use that category even in the titles: Hanna PAPANEK, *Family Status Production: The “Work” and “Non-Work” of Women*, *Signs* 4 (1979), no. 4, 775-781; Cynthia FUCHS EPSTEIN, *On the Non-Work Aspects of Work*, *The Antioch Review* 49 (1991), no. 1, 46-56. The category is much more frequently used within the texts. For two examples from the Germanophone area: Helga GREBING, *Hat die Arbeit eine Zukunft oder gibt es eine Zukunft ohne Arbeit?*, in: EHMER / GREBING / GUTSCHNER (eds.), “Arbeit”, 21-34, hier 30; Maria MIES, *Hausfrauisierung, Globalisierung, Subsistenzperspektive*, in: VAN DER LINDEN / ROTH (eds.), *Über Marx hinaus*, 257-289, hier 267.

²⁰ MIES, *Hausfrauisierung, Globalisierung, Subsistenzperspektive*.

²¹ Olwen H. HUFTON, *The Poor of Eighteenth-Century France. 1750-1789*. Oxford 1974; Steven KING / Alannah TOMKINS (eds.), *The Poor in England 1700-1850. An Economy of Makeshifts*. Manchester et al. 2003; Laurence FONTAINE / Jürgen SCHLUMBOHM (eds.), *Household Strategies for Survival 1600-2000. Fission, Faction, and Cooperation*, *International Review of Social History* 45 (2000), Supplement 8.

Political philosophy – one needs only to consider the operaist and post-operaist branch – has also focused intensively upon the fragmentation and reformulation of work in recent decades, and in particular on contemporary precarious occupational forms, in relation to which the very notion of “non-work” is frequently used.²²

From the perspective of psychological studies, the debate has been marked by uncertainties regarding how to clearly distinguish the field of “work” from that of “non-work”, although in this case, as in many other research branches, the tendency was and is to couple “non-work” with the private life or with unemployment, therefore making use of the notion of “work” which binds it at a theoretical level with highly formalized working activities.²³

The approach recently adopted by many interdisciplinary works as well as in the field of the sociology of labour will be more useful for the argumentation I am developing. They make reference, aside from the classical notion of “precarious” labour relations,²⁴ to “non-work” in order to refer precisely to those countless forms of “atypical” work which characterize the post-fordist age: project-related contracts, temporary jobs, “mini-jobs” etc. It encompasses a contractual typology and forms of labour relationships which elude labour law, which deprive the “pseudo-workers” of organizational systems, mechanisms of representation and social protection.²⁵

²² For a good overview: Patrick EIDEN-OFFE, *Der Verlust der Verweigerung: Von der Arbeiterklasse als Agentin der Nicht-Arbeit zur Selbstverwertung der Multitude. Abriss des (Post-)Operaismus*, in: Jörn ETZOLD / Martin Jörg SCHÄFER (eds.), *Nicht-Arbeit. Politiken, Konzepte, Ästhetiken*. Weimar 2011, 80-106. To the post-/operaist considerations one must add that branch of political philosophy (beginning with Hannah Arendt, through George Bataille, Jean-Luc Nancy up to Giorgio Agamben) which reflected on the relationship between activity/inactivity (the so-called *désœuvrement*) and democracy.

²³ Sabine A. E. GEURTS / Evangelia DEMEROUTI, *Work/Non-Work Interface: A Review of Theories and Findings*, in: Marc J. SCHABRACQ / Jacques A. M. WINNBUST / Cary L. COOPER (eds.), *The Handbook of Work and Health Psychology*. Chichester 2003, 279-312; Boris KABANOFF, *Work and Non-Work. A Review of Models, Methods, and Findings*, *Psychological Bulletin* 88 (1980), no. 1, 60-77; Scott SCHIEMAN, Melissa A. MILKIE, Paul GLAVIN, *When Work Interferes with Life: Work-Nonwork Interference and the Influence of Work-Related Demands and Resources*, *American Sociological Review* 74 (2009), no. 6, 966-988.

²⁴ For example: Robert CASTEL / Klaus DÖRRE (ed.), *Prekarität, Abstieg, Ausgrenzung: die soziale Frage am Beginn des 21. Jahrhunderts*. Frankfurt/M. et al. 2009.

²⁵ The literature on “the end of work” is incredibly extensive. I will limit myself to quoting some works which explicitly thematized the category of “non-work” from the perspective mentioned above: the relevant volume edited by HERLYN / MÜSKE / SCHÖNBERGER / SUTTER, *Arbeit und Nicht-Arbeit*; Aris ACCORNERO, *Lavoro e non lavoro*. Bologna 1980; Robert CASTEL, *Du travail social à la gestion sociale du non-travail*, *Esprit* 3-4 (mars-avril 1998), 28-47; ETZOLD / SCHÄFER (eds.), *Nicht-Arbeit*; *Penser le (non-)travail*. Perspectives interdisciplinaires, special issue of the French online periodical of German studies *Trajectoires* 6 (2012), with articles by Yoann BOGET, Martin BALOGE, Ségolène DÉBARRE, Miriam FREITAG, Hanna KLIMPE und Masoud POURAHMADALI TOCHAHI, <<http://trajectoires.revues.org/868?lang=de>>, 21.3.2014.

The use which is actually made of this category is therefore both of provocative and analytical nature, and it aims at deconstructing the “normative” aspects of some interpretations of work. The goal is not to delimit the field of “life”, of the “private”, of “free time”, distinguishing it from that of “work”, but on the contrary to extend the field of “work” to include several forms of occupations and activities,²⁶ above all non-formalized and somehow “irregular” jobs.

The category of “non-work” has the advantage of focusing immediately and directly on the normative and hegemonic relationship with work. It has furthermore the advantage of having a broad semantic field, which allows for covering several phenomena within an inclusive category, which will facilitate interdisciplinary dialogue. Moreover, a certain intrinsic ambiguity will prove particularly stimulating for the investigation of social phenomena which are “borderline” in many respects. In its ‘non self-evidence’ one can see its strength, as “it raises a doubt with relation to that social fact which seems evident”, the “work” indeed, enabling us to consider it critically.²⁷

In any case, this category has the disadvantage of often being misleading, because in some contexts it traditionally refers – as we have briefly seen – to fields of inactivity or of activities not directly linked with the individual or family subsistence (free time, rest). Therefore, the category of “non-work” requires, more than others, a constant clarification related to the meaning one chooses to attribute to it, having to distinguish between the more “traditional” (external to the field of work), and the more “critical”.

Owing to those difficulties contained in the notion of “non-work”, I find the notion of a “multiversum” of work and workers more intuitive and suitable, being sufficiently elastic, but without giving rise to too many misinterpretations. It has furthermore the merit of immediately focusing on the concept of work, expanding: to include non-orthodox workers. Leaving aside the notion of “precarious” labour relationships, which is generally linked with the contemporary age, the notion of a “multiversum of workers” seems to be better fitting for a “retrospective” use, applying it to the past: in short, for a historical approach. New labour history merges with the social history tradition of the subaltern classes, which I will return to in the following section.

2. Heterodox Jobs and the Informal Sector

Within the strictly historiographical field, the alleged “normality” of certain contractual forms and typologies of labour relationships have also been widely criticized.²⁸

²⁶ For critical remarks regarding an excessive semantic expansion, which is, following the Author, typical of the present day: Rudolf Helmstetter, *When Everything Is Work, It's Hard to Know What's Not (Wir arbeiten dran)*, in: ETZOLD / SCHÄFER (eds.), *Nicht-Arbeit*, 40-79.

²⁷ BOGET et al., *Penser le (non-)travail*.

²⁸ Marcel VAN DER LINDEN, *How Normal is the “Normal” Employment Relationship?*, in: IDEM, *Transnational Labour History. Explorations*. Aldershot 2003, 197-203; CONRAD / MACAMO / ZIMMERMANN, *Die Kodifizierung der Arbeit*; Peter GUTSCHNER, *Von der Norm zur Normalität?*

This concerns that revision of labour history which I mentioned at the beginning of this text. One can add other historiographical branches which have been dealing all along with numerous jobs previously considered as somehow “marginal” from the perspective of traditional labour history.

First of all, for an investigation of the “boundaries” of the work, the reach tradition of social history and the history “from below” is of great importance, thus the works of now “classical” authors for the study of western European societies (far less used for the research on Eastern European societies), such as George Rudé, Christopher Hill, Charles Tilly, obviously besides Eric J. Hobsbawm and the “heterodox” Edward P. Thompson.²⁹ To them one must add the history of those on the margins of society,³⁰ microhistory and anthropological history, gender and cultural history.³¹

Particular attention must also be devoted to how socio-economic history has dealt with the so-called “informal sector”.³² There are endless definitions of “informal sector”, and rightly so, as each and every scholar stresses a different aspect and they depend on specific research goals. Very briefly, the general understanding of “informal sector” is “the activities which take place outside socially hegemonic rules for the process of production and the working process, with relation to the conditions of work, social protection, competition rules, the realization and quality of the product”.³³ The range of included activities is quite wide, from the ordinary, everyday activity of the poor (in order to “make ends meet”), through controversial, even semi-legal activities (such

Begriff und Bedeutung von Arbeit im Diskurs der Neuzeit, in: IDEM / Joseph EHMER / Helga GREBING (eds.), *“Arbeit”: Geschichte – Gegenwart – Zukunft*. Leipzig 2002, 137-148.

²⁹ A useful tool for guiding the reader through this reach research branch is the *Encyclopedia of European Social History 1350-2000*, 6 vols., ed. by Peter N. STEARNS. New York 2001; cf. Jürgen KOCKA (ed.), *Sozialgeschichte im internationalen Überblick. Ergebnisse und Tendenzen der Forschung*. Darmstadt 1989.

³⁰ Jean-Claude SCHMITT, *L'histoire des marginaux*, in: Jacques LE GOFF (ed.), *La nouvelle histoire*. Paris 1978, 344-369.

³¹ As it is clearly impossible to give an adequate account of all these developments, I will refer only to some reference works: Peter BURKE (ed.), *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*. Cambridge 1991; IDEM, *What is Cultural History?* Cambridge 2004; Jürgen OSTERHAMMEL / Dieter LANGEWIESCHE / Paul NOLTE (eds.), *Wege der Gesellschaftsgeschichte*. Göttingen 2006; Gisela BOCK, *Frauen in der europäischen Geschichte*. München 2005; for recent and inspiring approaches to the history of poor people: Andreas GESTRICH / Steven KING / Lutz RAPHAEL (eds.), *Being Poor in Modern Europe. Historical Perspectives 1800-1940*. Berlin et al. 2006.

³² Andrea KOMLOSY / Christof PARNREITER / Irene STACHER / Susan ZIMMERMANN (eds.), *Ungeregt und unterbezahlt. Der informelle Sektor in der Weltwirtschaft*. Frankfurt/M. 1997; Sabyasachi BHATTACHARYA / Jan LUCASSEN (eds.), *Workers in the Informal Sector. Studies in Labour History 1800-2000*. New Delhi 2005.

³³ Andrea KOMLOSY, *Textiles Verlagswesen, Hausindustrie und Heimarbeit. Prototypen des informellen Sektors im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert*, in: IDEM / PARNREITER / STACHER / ZIMMERMANN (eds.), *Ungeregt und unterbezahlt*, 63-85, here 64.

as expense-account padding or “creative bookkeeping” of large firms), to the opposite extreme: the billions of the international crime networks.³⁴

It is a topic which became of great interest in the 1970s, following the (failed) politics of “development planning” in the Third World, and the experiences of economic planning in European socialist countries. In both contexts, the embedded presence of informal economic structures and processes clearly emerged. Through several denominations, the so-called “moonlight economy”, the parallel and informal economy and its concrete relationships with the official economy, is currently among the standard research issues of social and economic anthropology,³⁵ of research in economics, and of economic sociology.³⁶

One extremely interesting aspect of this approach, for those who deal with the history of East/Southeast Europe, is that it considers very critically the debate linked with the classical development and dependency theories (1950s-60s). Is the presence of a marked informal sector in a given society a symptom of its backwardness? Is it a factor that must be overcome, perhaps through its better regulation and thus incorporation into the “formal” sector? Or is it merely excessive formalization, as maintained by the theorists of the neoliberal economy, which prevents development, and therefore the solution would be radical “deregulation”?

Beyond some “development theories”, now widely criticized, it seems that the “informal sector” should be considered not as a “residue” of the pre-industrial age, but rather as an integral element of capitalist development.³⁷ With regard to the former socialist countries, apart from the relevant presence of informal economies generally accepted by scholars, their relationships with the formal economy and their social and cultural roles still need to be deeply investigated from a historiographical point

³⁴ M. ESTELLIE SMITH, *Informal Economy*, in: Stuart PLATTNER (ed.), *Economic Anthropology*. Stanford/CA 1989, 292-317, 292.

³⁵ ESTELLIE SMITH, *Informal Economy*; Christian GIORDANO, *Die Betrogenen der Geschichte. Überlagerungsmentalität und Überlagerungsrationalität in mediterranen Gesellschaften*. Frankfurt/M., New York 1992, 258-282; Carolyn NORDSTROM, *Global Outlaws. Crime, Money, and Power in the Contemporary World*. Berkeley/CA 2007; Mathias WAGNER, *Die Schmugglergesellschaft. Informelle Ökonomien an der Ostgrenze der Europäischen Union. Eine Ethnographie*. Bielefeld 2011; Bettina BRUNS/Judith MIGGELBRINK (eds.), *Subverting Borders. Doing Research on Smuggling and Small-Scale Trade*. Wiesbaden 2012.

³⁶ Alejandro PORTES/William HALLER, *The Informal Economy*, in: Neil J. SMELSER/Richard SWEDBERG (eds.), *The Handbook of Economic Sociology*. Princeton/NJ 2005, 403-425; Bruno S. FREY/Friedrich SCHNEIDER, *Informal and Underground Economy*, in: Orley ASHENFELTER (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Social and Behavioral Science*, vol. 12: Economics. Amsterdam 2001, 7441-7446; Friedrich SCHNEIDER/Dominik H. ENSTE, *The Shadow Economy. An International Survey*. Cambridge 2013; R. T. NAYLOR, *Wages of Crime. Black Markets, Illegal Finance, and the Underworld Economy*. Ithaca/NY 2005; Willem VAN SCHENDEL/Abraham ITTY (eds.), *Illicit Flows and Criminal Things. States, Borders, and the Other Side of Globalization*. Bloomington/IN 2005.

³⁷ KOMLOSY/PARNREITER/STACHER/ZIMMERMANN, *Der informelle Sektor. Konzepte, Widersprüche und Debatten*, in: EADEM (eds.), *Ungeregelt und unterbezahlt*, 9-28, here 22.

of view.³⁸ In general terms, the scholars of the field suggest a flexible approach, which contemplates both the reactions to increasing state regulations (both of capitalist and of socialist character), and the persistence of cultural models and traditional practices, sometimes of a “resistant” consciousness (as opposition to the government), sometimes due to a kind of “inertia”.³⁹

Such reflections raise the question of the peculiarities of “modernity”, taking the last two centuries into consideration first of all. Up to now, the investigation of the “informal” and the “heterodox” has been predominantly linked to modern “formality”, as illustrated above. But one could observe that work was – differently, but undeniably – somehow “formalized” in the pre-modern era also, and that the question of the fluidity of the boundaries between “work” and “non-work” also refers to the pre-modern era. Therefore, an innovative research for the future could investigate this cluster of issues in a *long durée* perspective,⁴⁰ in order to better distinguish the proper and the alleged discontinuities of modern time.⁴¹

Thanks to this comparative point of view, which allows for synchronic (global) and diachronic comparisons, what clearly emerges is how limited such an approach, which conceives of industrial wage work as the “norm” of “work”, actually is; such regulation was “typical” only for a determined, and rather short period of European history, only for some European regions, and even then only for some of their workers’ groups. Even more so, labour relations “scarcely regulated or not regulated at all, are, from the birth of capitalism on and considered in global terms, much more ‘typical’”.⁴²

The category of “informal sector”, although born in relation to the contemporary age, is quite suitable for a historiographical application, and it has the further advantage of emphasizing the relationship with rules, the law (especially the tax system) and the political field. Marked from the beginning by a notable semantic elasticity, the category has recently been further broadened, leading to an “expanded definition”, to include “all forms of ‘informal employment’ – that is, employment without labour or social protection – both within and without informal enterprises, including both self-employment in small unregistered enterprises and wage employment in unprotected jobs”.⁴³

³⁸ A recent, wide-ranging study of the Polish case: Jerzy KOCHANOWSKI, *Jenseits der Planwirtschaft. Der “Schwarzmarkt” in Polen 1944-1989*. Göttingen 2013.

³⁹ ESTELLIE SMITH, *Informal Economy*, 309-312.

⁴⁰ See the first research hypotheses and historiographical attempts by Marcel VAN DER LINDEN, *Studying Attitudes to Work Worldwide, 1500-1650. Concepts, Sources, and Problems of Interpretation*, *International Review of Social History* 56 (2011), Special Issue, 25-43.

⁴¹ A plea in this direction, with regard to the historical study of prostitution, in: Timothy J. GILFOYLE, *Prostitutes in History. From Parables of Pornography to Metaphors of Modernity*, *American Historical Review* 104 (1999), no. 1, 117-141, here 136f.

⁴² KOMLOSY/PARNREITER/STACHER/ZIMMERMANN, *Der informelle Sektor*, 21.

⁴³ Martha ALTER CHEN, *Rethinking the Informal Economy. Linkages with the Formal Economy and the Formal Regulatory Environment*, DESA Working Paper no. 46 (July 2007), 2.

The Fluid Boundaries of “Work”

It is perhaps opportune, therefore, to further clarify and stress that by using this category generally we are not speaking merely of those often defined at one time as “subaltern classes”. The informal sector covers international crime and extends to bribed politicians, aside from legal productive or market activities which are “informal” as they do not pay taxes, or simply because they are differently structured in comparison with the formal sector (in short: less institutionalization of economic activities, horizontal networks and non-vertical bureaucracies, subcontracting prevailing over union contracts, expanding cash economy, barter as a crucial feature of international exchange). Studies in both advanced industrial and less developed countries have shown “the relatively high level of income of many informal entrepreneurs”⁴⁴. An even clearer illustration: “Informal economy is not a euphemism for poverty. It is a specific form of relationships of production, while poverty is an attribute linked to the process of distribution. [...] The informal economy is not a set of survival activities performed by destitute people.”⁴⁵

The notion of a “multiversum of workers” seems therefore more fitting for those interested in investigating the non-orthodox workers mentioned at the beginning of this text. It is a fluid category, which includes subjects who could quickly move from one occupation and one “status” to another, or who could have many at the same time. The range is certainly wide, but not to the extent that corrupt politicians and bosses of the international mafia are comprised. These are more than legitimate subjects for historiographical investigation, but perhaps the notion of a “multiversum of workers” is more practical for a revision of labour history. It does not limit itself to marginal social actors, but neither on the other hand does it excessively expand its semantic field.

Regardless, this is not a plea for a category, but rather for a research field and an approach. The reflection on categories is certainly not a purely nominalistic question, as behind every category (and one could add others, such as that of “peripheral workers”⁴⁶) lie different accents, sometimes specific approaches and research goals. It is for this reason that I briefly illustrated different notions above, which may be useful for approaching, from different points of view, the general issue of the heterogeneity of the “worlds of labour”. What also seems important to me is to adopt, for the study of South-Eastern Europe, the recent revision of labour history which comprises, among other elements, the extension of the notion of work, emancipating itself from a narrow understanding of it and bringing back under scrutiny manifold forms of occupations.

⁴⁴ Manuel CASTELLS / Alejandro PORTES, *World Underneath. The Origins, Dynamics, and Effects of the Informal Economy*, in: EADEM / LAUREN A. BENTON (eds.), *The Informal Economy. Studies in Advanced and Less Developed Countries*. Baltimore/MD, London 1989, 11-37, here 12.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁶ Shahid AMIN / Marcel VAN DER LINDEN (eds.), *Peripheral Labour. Studies in the History of Partial Proletarianization*, *International Review of Social History* 41 (1996), Supplement 4.

3. The Multiversum of Workers and the Historiography on South-Eastern Europe

In a (not left-leaning) daily newspaper published in Sarajevo between the two world wars one can read that:

“At the Storehouse of uncured tobacco there exists the institution of the workers’ delegates, who are a sort of link between the workers and the Administration of the [Tobacco, SP] Monopoly. It is comprehensible that in the notion of worker one has to include permanent as well as temporary workers, all the more so as the temporary workers need even more intercession by their workers’ delegate, than the permanent ones, because the permanent worker can’t be fired so easily without having carried out an inquiry, while the temporary ones, or – as they are called – the “seasonal” ones, can be immediately fired, with a reason or without it. It is just for them that the workers’ delegate is necessary, for being defended in their hard work, but it happens exactly the contrary, because the Labour Inspection⁴⁷ decreed, that only the permanent workers have the right to vote their delegate, while the temporary – seasonal – ones don’t have this right. This regulation appears somehow bizarre, as it was the effect of a *lapsus calami* [in the original, SP], because it is clear that precisely the temporary workers need their delegate, even if they should select him among the permanent workers, because the main point is that they, too, have to participate to the election.”⁴⁸

The article also goes on to clarify that in that factory there were 28 permanent workers, while the seasonal workers numbered 200, and thirty of the latter were employed all the year long. The fact that only the former had the right to vote was considered by the author of the text an “absurdity”.

The framework of the complaint expressed through the quoted article is the entire juridical system and the system of the workers’ representation which grew out between the 19th and the 20th century, which rested upon “fully-fledged” workers. They were considered the “norm” to be faced, while the “irregular” workers were an “exception” one could overlook. As we have seen, the most perspicacious commentators promptly considered this situation an “absurdity”, requiring revision, both theoretical and concrete.

The quoted text thus reminds us that the issues this article is dealing with are historically present in South-Eastern Europe. It would be therefore extremely useful, if informal, irregular, marginal jobs, “non-works”, were to be more fully investigated in the future, also in relation to the modern history of South-Eastern Europe. The aim would be to connect the several research branches which I have briefly depicted, establishing a fruitful dialogue with them. It will be necessary to tend towards a social history of the representations, the structures, the actions, the cognitive dimensions and the practices linked to “irregular” workers.

⁴⁷ Established in December 1921, the Labour Inspection was an Agency of the Ministry for the Social Politics, aiming at monitoring the implementation of labour law and workers’ protection.

⁴⁸ Stalni i nestalni radnici, *Večernja pošta*, 14.5.1928.

In general terms, labour history seems to be a quite under-researched field for South-Eastern Europe,⁴⁹ an issue which had clearly become “out of fashion” by 1989.⁵⁰ In the 1970s and 80s, one could observe “the considerable interest in processes of industrialization” which resulted in the investigation of “the emergence of an industrial working class, socialist currents, organizational forms of labour movement, as well as leftwing political parties”.⁵¹ On the basis of this research tradition, labour history in South-Eastern Europe today requires deep revision in several respects. In this article I chose to stress one of the possible developments, firmly anchored to an expanded notion of “work”.

One way of embarking on this effort could be that of focusing on the atypical urban workers, with special attention paid to those on the social margins.⁵² In this perspective, there are some isolated studies on specific phenomena such as prostitution in the Ottoman and late-Habsburg time,⁵³ or on certain forms of nomadic work.⁵⁴ Those on the margins of society are traditionally represented in the investigation of the birth of

⁴⁹ Sabine RUTAR, Towards a Southeast European History of Labour. Examples from Yugoslavia, in: IDEM (ed.), *Beyond the Balkans. Towards an Inclusive History of Southeastern Europe*. Wien, Zürich, Berlin 2014, 325-356; Peter HEUMOS, Workers under Communist Rule. Research in the Former Socialist Countries of Eastern-Central and South-Eastern Europe and in the Federal Republic of Germany, *International Review of Social History* 55 (2010), no. 1, 83-115. I will refer to these two essays for general remarks about the history of labour on South-Eastern Europe.

⁵⁰ Fikret ADANIR, Introduction, in: IDEM (ed.), *Social Movements in Southeast Europe. Reassessment of Historiography and Perspectives for Future Research*, *Mitteilungsblatt des Instituts für soziale Bewegungen* 33 (2005), 5-10, here 9.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, 8.

⁵² I would like my current research project to make a contribution in this direction: “Marginal Workers. Prostitutes, Vagrants and Jobless People in Yugoslavia (1918-1941)”, cf. <<http://www.ios-regensburg.de/en/people/staff/stefano-petrungaro/projects.html>>, 17.12.2013.

⁵³ Malte FUHRMANN, Vagrants, Prostitutes, and Bosnians. Making and Unmaking European Supremacy in Ottoman Southeast Europe, in: Hannes GRANDITS / Nathalie CLAYER / Robert PICHLER (eds.), *Conflicting Loyalties in the Balkans. The Great Powers, the Ottoman Empire and Nation-Building*. London, New York 2011, 15-45; IDEM, Down and Out on the Quays of Izmir: “European” Musicians, Innkeepers, and Prostitutes in the Ottoman Port Cities, *Mediterranean Historical Review* 24 (2009), no. 2, 169-185; in general: Donald QUATAERT, Labor History and the Ottoman Empire, c. 1700-1922, *International Labor and Working-Class History* 60 (2001), 93-109; Touraj ATABAKI / Gavin BROCKETT (eds.), Ottoman and Turkish Labour History, *International Review of Social History* 54 (2009), Supplement; Amila KASUMOVIĆ, Prilog povijesti marginalnih skupina u Bosni i Hercegovini u doba austro-ugarske uprave: prostitutke, *Historijski zbornik* 60 (2007), 161-178; Tomislav ZORKO, Ženska prostitucija u Zagrebu između 1899. i 1934. godine, *Časopis za suvremenu povijest* 38 (2006), no. 1, 223-241.

⁵⁴ Robert PICHLER, Hirten, Söldner und Wanderarbeiter. Formen der mobilen Ökonomie in den Dörfern des albanischen Hochlandes, in: IDEM / Karl KASER / Stephanie SCHWANDNER-SIEVERS (eds.), *Die weite Welt und das Dorf. Albanische Emigration am Ende des 20. Jahrhunderts*. Wien 2002, 133-161.

the welfare state.⁵⁵ Some works of social and economic history draw attention towards the marginal actors of society and of the labour market,⁵⁶ while issues linked with informality, the women's question and domestic labour emerge in the works – more numerous in comparison with those on other chronological fields – regarding “work”, as well as unemployment, during the socialist period.⁵⁷ Forced labour has also emerged as a fruitful research field related to Eastern and South-Eastern Europe.⁵⁸ On the basis of such recent studies, it will be possible in the future to approach more directly and more deeply the issue of informal and irregular work, in the terms advanced by this article.⁵⁹

Why should we apply these reflections to the European South-East? The reasons are numerous and of varying nature. First of all, this would enable us to investigate the “borders” of work from the point of view of “semi-peripheral” countries, if related to the European and global economy. This would then allow us to observe how certain

⁵⁵ Susan ZIMMERMANN, *Prächtige Armut. Fürsorge, Kinderschutz und Sozialreform in Budapest. Das “sozialpolitische Laboratorium“ der Doppelmonarchie im Vergleich zu Wien 1873-1914.* Sigmaringen 1997; IDEM, *Geschützte und ungeschützte Arbeitsverhältnisse von der Hochindustrialisierung bis zur Weltwirtschaftskrise. Österreich und Ungarn im Vergleich*, in: KOMLOSY/PARNREITER/STACHER/ZIMMERMANN (eds.), *Ungeregt und unterbezahlt*, 87-115; IDEM, *Divide, Provide and Rule. An Integrative History of Poverty Policy, Social Policy, and Social Reform in Hungary under the Habsburg Monarchy.* Budapest 2012.

⁵⁶ An excellent example: Marie-Janine CALIC, *Sozialgeschichte Serbiens 1815-1941. Der aufhaltsame Fortschritt während der Industrialisierung.* München 1994.

⁵⁷ Klaus ROTH (ed.), *Arbeitswelt – Lebenswelt. Facetten einer spannungsreichen Beziehung im östlichen Europa.* Berlin, Münster 2006; IDEM (ed.), *Sozialismus: Realitäten und Illusionen. Ethnologische Aspekte der sozialistischen Alltagskultur.* Wien 2005; IDEM (ed.), *Arbeit im Sozialismus – Arbeit im Postsozialismus. Erkundungen des Arbeitslebens im östlichen Europa.* Münster 2004; Ulf BRUNNBAUER, „Die sozialistische Lebensweise“. *Ideologie, Gesellschaft, Familie und Politik in Bulgarien (1944-1989).* Wien 2007; Peter HÜBNER/Christoph KLESSMANN/Klaus TENFELDE (eds.), *Arbeiter im Staatssozialismus. Ideologischer Anspruch und soziale Wirklichkeit.* Köln 2005; Mark PITTAWAY, *The Workers' State. Industrial Labor and the Making of Socialist Hungary 1944-1958.* Pittsburgh/PA 2012; Susan L. WOODWARD, *Socialist Unemployment. The Political Economy of Yugoslavia, 1945-1990.* Princeton/NJ 1995.

⁵⁸ Sabine RUTAR, *Arbeit und Überleben in Serbien. Das Kupfererzbergwerk Bor im Zweiten Weltkrieg.* *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 31 (2005), no. 1, 101-134; IDEM, *Heldentum, Verrat und Arbeit in Jugoslawien. Arbeitseinsatz im sozialistischen Kontext*, in: SEIDEL/TENFELDE (eds.), *Zwangsarbeit im Europa des 20. Jahrhunderts*, 75-101; Tanja PENTER, *Kohle für Stalin und Hitler. Arbeiten und Leben im Donbass 1929 bis 1953.* Essen 2010; Zoran JANJETOVIĆ, „U skladištu sa nastalom potrebom...“. *Prinudni rad u okupiranoj Srbiji 1941-1944.* Beograd 2012; Florian DIERL/Zoran JANJETOVIĆ/Karsten LINNE, *Pflicht, Zwang und Gewalt. Arbeitsverwaltungen und Arbeitskräftepolitik im deutsch besetzten Polen und Serbien 1939-1944.* Essen 2013; Sanela HODZIC/Christian SCHÖLZEL, *Zwangsarbeit und der Unabhängige Staat Kroatien 1941-1945.* Berlin et al. 2013.

⁵⁹ There are some new research initiatives which are moving in this direction, for example the Research Initiative on “Labor History for the 21st Century in a Global Perspective”, located at Central European University Budapest, and at the Russian and East European desk of the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam.

general dynamics came to affect the legacies of the Habsburg and Ottoman empires. Thanks to the intertwining of heritages and juridical, administrative, and cultural practices the region represents a particularly fruitful terrain for the study of specific strategies implemented by the institutions with regards to “irregular” workers.

It could be very productive, when dealing with South-Eastern European history, to move away from a labour history focused on industrial work due to the history of the industrialization process in these regions, which were for a long time in the modern age, and remain partly to this day, predominantly agricultural countries. What kinds of “norms” developed and were established in these contexts? Which “discourses” defined and redefined the limits between “recognized” and “non-recognized” work? What roles did gender, class, religion and ethnicity play? Which analogies and which differences can be detected in a European and global comparative perspective?

Furthermore, a history of the multiversum of workers, being mainly concerned with countries which experienced “real socialism” in the second half of the 20th century, would allow us to integrate and partly amend the official historiographies of the socialist period, which did not speak about such topics. It is also necessary to integrate post-socialist historiographies, as they too have remained mostly silent on these topics.⁶⁰ It is perhaps also due to this gap in the research, that one can note that international labour history, despite its effort to think “globally”, covers the South-Eastern European region with difficulty. Still, the inclusion of these regional experiences would allow us to have at our disposal relevant elements for a compared, transnational and entangled history of work and of the various social groups of workers. In general terms, “Southeast (and east European) types of labour ought to become a much more substantial part” of the broad concept of “work” used by global labour history⁶¹; by doing so, the labour history of South-Eastern Europe could greatly benefit from the developments which took place in the global labour history, and vice versa.

Finally, the questions linked to the history of the variegated world of work prompt heuristic questions of great relevance for an updated social, cultural and political history of these regions. The different attitudes elaborated and applied in the past by

⁶⁰ For a general overview of the historiographies of South-Eastern Europe: Ulf BRUNNBAUER (ed.), (Re)Writing History. Historiography in Southeast Europe after Socialism. Münster 2004; about the (non-)study of the socialist period: IDEM, Ein neuer weißer Fleck? Der Realsozialismus in der aktuellen Geschichtsschreibung in Südosteuropa, in: IDEM/Stefan TROEBST (eds.), Zwischen Amnesie und Nostalgie. Die Erinnerung an den Kommunismus in Südosteuropa. Köln et al. 2007, 87-111; Stefano PETRUNGARO, Gli istituti statali di storia contemporanea nei paesi successori della Jugoslavia. Uno sguardo d'insieme, *Quaderni storici* 43 (2008), no. 2, 433-453. Some recent works, which have begun to reassess the socialist period: Hannes GRANDITS/Karin TAYLOR (eds.), Yugoslavia's Sunny Side. A History of Tourism in Socialism (1950s-1980s). Budapest, New York 2010; Breda LUTHAR/Maruša PUŠNIK (eds.), Remembering Utopia. The Culture of Everyday Life in Socialist Yugoslavia. Washington/DC 2010; Igor DUĐA, Pronađeno blagostanje. Svakodnevni život i potrošačka kultura u Hrvatskoj 1970-ih i 1980-ih. Zagreb 2010; cfr. RUTAR, Towards a Southeast European History of Labour, 327.

⁶¹ Ibidem, 326.

various institutions towards the various types of workers tell us a lot about the juridical cultures, the administrative practices, as well as the social politics which underwent a process of mutation during that time. We must therefore address questions regarding state interventionism, the so-called “social hygiene”, state- and nation-building. These are issues which for decades have enjoyed special consideration in the research agenda regarding the modern history of South-Eastern Europe, a research field which, following the approach I have outlined in the text, could benefit from fresh and inspiring input for its future.

ABSTRACT

The Fluid Boundaries of “Work”

The article raises some crucial questions related to the “boundaries of work”: how to conceive, to name, and to approach the limits between what is socially, legally, economically considered “work”, and what is not? The text provides a critical review of the rich interdisciplinary debate around this issue, considering the merits and disadvantages of categories such as “non-work”, “informal sector”, “multiversum of work” and other related ones. Focusing especially on the historiographical aspects of the debate, and considering their applicability to the South-East European region, the article aims at providing theoretical considerations, which can contribute to the innovation of the social history of labour in this region.