

PANEL 8

Scientific Management of Labour in Central and Eastern Europe: Saxony 1750–1790, Vienna 1900–1920, Romania 1980–2020

/ Organized by Sebastian Felten and Nikolaus Thoman

/ Freitag, 17.9.21, 15.45–16.45 Uhr

/ Themenstrang “Social Scales” (Einwahllink)

/ Sebastian Felten (University of Vienna)

How Solid is the Rock? Extraction of Workers’ Knowledge in 18th-Century Mining

/ Freitag, 17.9.21, 15.45–16.45 Uhr

This paper examines a short book about “rock” (Gestein) written by the geologist and government official Abraham Gottlob Werner in 1788. Rock, in this case, was not an epistemic object in the emerging earth sciences, that studied fossils, minerals, and the formation of mountains. Instead, I argue that it was a concern for an early attempt at the scientific management of mines. Early-modern mining was expensive and technically challenging, and it was not always profitable. Therefore, scholar-officials like Werner looked for ways to employ less labour. In their search, they drew on workers’ knowledge, especially of the behaviour of underground rock. They plotted complex categories used by workers to describe the rock on a simple 5–graded scale to facilitate control. Thus, scholars transformed workers’ knowledge into a “science” (Wissenschaft) of mining work. Current models of early modern knowledge production engaging both scholars and practitioners, such as the trading zone and hybridization, do not adequately explain this transformation. I propose complementing these models with the notion of extraction. Scholar-officials extracted knowledge from workers, amalgamated it with other knowledge (such as mineralogy), and then re-introduced it to the workforce, not in the form of new theories, but as instructions for how to perform labour. Unlike in the trading zone and hybridization models, this process tended to reinforce, rather than weaken, the distinctions between different types of knowledge and different groups of knowers.

Sebastian Felten (PhD, King’s College London) ist Historiker mit Schwerpunkt auf Finanz, Wissenschaft und Bürokratie im neuzeitlichen Europa und seit 2019 Universitätsassistent (Postdoc) am Institut für Geschichte mit Schwerpunkt Wissenschaftsgeschichte in Wien. Momentan arbeitet er an zwei größeren Projekten: (1) eine Monographie über Geld als Sozialtechnik am Beispiel der Niederländischen Republik (ca. 1650–1850); (2) ein zweites Buch/Habilitation über Wissensproduktion im sächsischen Bergbau (ca. 1500–1850) durch Bergbeamte, Arbeiter, Kaufleute, und Gelehrte.

/ Nikolaus Thoman (University of Vienna)

Governing Abilities: Intelligence Testing for the Labour Market in Red Vienna

/ Freitag, 17.9.21, 15.45–16.45 Uhr

Around 1900, a range of psychological examination, testing, and diagnosing practices found their way into people’s everyday life, be it in schools, the military, or hospitals. This paper will discuss a specific intelligence test developed by the influential Austrian paediatrician Erwin Lazar, who as a consultant to the Department of Social Welfare and the city council shaped social services in ‘Red’ Vienna and beyond. Lazar’s test aimed at a more rational allocation of welfare funds by ranking children from feeble-minded, idiotic, imbecile, or normal; while high-scoring candidates received schooling or professional training, very low scores resulted in being placed in a madhouse. Later, however, the test was also used in youth detention centres and for managing the Austrian labour market. In this paper, I will trace the history of the test as it moved from psychological debates in the late Habsburg empire

via child welfare to the scientific management of labour under a socialist regime. Using Lazar's publications as well as archival material from the Department of Social Welfare, I argue that mental testing was introduced on the labour market because actors found technocracy promising during a politically turbulent time, and because the data practices of the Austrian state were already poised to adopt a more numerical approach to labour allocation.

Nikolaus Thoman ist seit Dezember 2019 Prae-Doc am Institut für Geschichte der Universität Wien. Davor war er Assistenzkurator am Haus der Geschichte Österreich, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek sowie selbstständiger Historiker (Haus der Geschichte Österreich, Schlossmuseum Trautenfels, u.a.).

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Knowing

for

Capital:

Managerial Permutations in a Romanian Automobile Factory (1981—2019)

/ Freitag, 17.9.21, 15.45–16.45 Uhr

The paper follows the history of a single automobile factory in Craiova, Romania, whose ownership since 1976 has been successively linked to a joint venture between the Romanian socialist state with the French manufacturer Citroën, to the South Korean conglomerate Daewoo, and recently to Ford. The evolution of car industry in Craiova functions as a strategic research site for advancing two questions about the transformations in the labour process, workplace authority, and the knowledge production mechanisms undergirding them on the cusp between the 20th and the 21st centuries. First, how has the reconfiguration of embodied and embedded knowledge in the Romanian factory been intrinsically interconnected with the perils and chances of the fluid world market in which Citroën, Daewoo, and Ford had to survive and make profit? And second, what kind of knowledge(s) constituted the foundation for the main transformations undertaken by heteronomous relationships at the point of production in car industry, when we look at three rapidly succeeding reconfigurations of ownership, market strategies, and management styles? During the last two decades, various strands of scholarship have increasingly acknowledged the failure of the old labour process perspective to integrate an understanding of labour at the point of production into an analysis of seemingly ever-expanding value chains. My paper contributes to this conversation by illuminating the ways in which local managerial logics came to be intrinsically linked to global capitalist dynamics in the Eastern European car industry. Based on archival material, ethnographic fieldwork, life histories of industrial workers, and interviews with technical experts and managers, it explores the complex ways in which global movements of capital, technological innovation, and shifting managerial ideologies have been translated into local reorganizations of production in Eastern Europe in the last forty years.

Alina-Sandra Cucu holds a PhD in Sociology and Social Anthropology from Central European University, Budapest. She was a junior researcher at the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science in Berlin and a visiting scholar at the International Research Centre 'Work and Human Lifecycle in Global History' (re:work) at Humboldt University. She is currently working on a second book project that investigates the incorporation of the Romanian car industry into global commodity chains since the mid-1960s.