

Call for papers for the session 176
Work and the Life Course in Comparative Perspective
for the XVIth World Economic History Congress, Stellenbosch, 9-13 July, 2012

This session is organized by the International Research Centre "Work and Human Life Cycle in Global History" (re:work) at Humboldt University Berlin, Germany in collaboration with the Department for Social and Economic History at the University of Vienna, Austria.

The purpose of the session will be the analysis of major changes in the relations between work and the life course in the transitions from pre-industrial to industrial and from industrial to post-industrial economies and societies. In history, age has been one of the major factors (usually in combination with class and gender) which determine the position of individuals in the world of work, and which regulate their allocation to and their preferences for various types of work, such as gainful employment, housework and care. In many pre-and early industrial modes of production, particularly in Europe, the main feature of the life course was the transition from dependent work and wage labor at a young age to the position of self-employed or employer at a later age. The spread of industrial capitalism and the trend towards life-long wage labor created new patterns such as the U-shaped work careers of women due to the male-breadwinner/female-housekeeper model from the late 19th to the late 20th century. In advanced capitalism and particularly where it is associated with the welfare state, the so-called "institutionalization of the life course" (education-work-retirement) created and prolonged work-free life cycle stages in youth and old age and an ever stronger concentration of labor force participation in the middle years. Recent discussions in economics and sociology, however, raise the question of "de-institutionalization" of the life course as part of the transition to a post-modern economy.

The first aim of the session is to stress the significance of the life course as an analytical category in economic and social history. The second aim is to stimulate comparative perspectives. Therefore, the session will include papers on early modern, modern and post-modern worlds of work; on the changing labor force participation of women and men as well as of young and elderly persons; and on work in colonial, post-colonial and "Western" contexts. Thirdly, the overarching theoretical question concerns the impact of social structural change and of changing preferences of individuals on the allocation of various types of work and of work and leisure to life cycle stages. The idea that led to this session was born at the International Research Center Work and Human Life Cycle in Global History at Humboldt University Berlin, Germany. Some of the projects of (former) fellows will be presented to a wider public at the WEHC, and linked to ongoing research in other academic settings.

Session organizers:

Andreas Eckert (re:work / Humboldt University Berlin, Germany)

Josef Ehmer (University of Vienna, Austria)

Abstracts for this session should contain no more than 400 words and should be sent to josef.ehmer@univie.ac.at before the 10th of February. The paper presenters will be informed about their selection before the 15th of March. Papers should be submitted before the 15th of June in order to give session participants and commentators sufficient time to prepare.