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Mobility and the future of work

This international workshop seeks to engage with the intersecting notions of mobilities, work and the future.

Processes of globalisation and neoliberalism have affected contemporary practices and perceptions of mobility and work. Whether for the global middle class traveller (Amit 2007) or the precarious labour migrant, geographic mobility is perceived as a strategy that bears the potential to improve one's life/existential condition. These improvements need not be solely economic, but can relate to notions of freedom, increased social and network capital (Larsen, Urry and Axhausen, 2006), and values of cosmopolitan openness (Hage, 2005; Olwig, 2007; Salazar, 2016; Schneider and Limmer, 2007).

Job-related spatial mobility, in the form of permanent migration, seasonal and short-term migration or daily commuting, is not a new phenomenon. However, the rise of digital and communication technologies is transforming the way work is conceived, allocated, and performed. On the one hand, emerging forms of mobile work practices hold the promise for more individual freedom in terms of time-management and work-life balance, questioning the idea of a fixed workplace and vertical organizations. On the other hand, these same processes serve the neoliberal ideology of flexible capitalism (Sennet, 1998) dominated by short-term contracts and on-demand work, evident in the instability and insecurity of much platform-based labour. More fundamentally, mobile work practices challenge received notions of not just work and home, but also ideas of leisure, productive age, and retirement.

Although anthropology is not a predictive discipline, scholars in our field engage the future in numerous ways, via categories like imagination, aspiration, temporalities, and hope (Pine, 2014; Hage, 2009). We also engage with confronting and intervening in the challenges of contested and controversial futures (Salazar, Pink, Irving & Sjöbert, 2017) as well as making sense of livelihood strategies in contexts perceived as futureless (Kurtović 2017). What is the contribution of ethnographically derived

knowledge to the visioning and making of futures of work and mobility?

We understand being mobile not only as a question of movement, but also of intentions, strategies and choices that shape new social spaces (Canzler, Kaufmann and Kesselring, 2008). Given this framework, we ask how the positive social value of mobility in the contemporary world is affecting changing attitudes toward work and shaping future socialities (Postill and Pink, 2012; Frömming et al., 2017), particularly with regard to their scalability (Miller et al., 2016). This workshop thus represents an attempt to decipher and trace the intersection between new forms of labour, precarity, and mobility. How is the work–leisure binary reformulated in relation to mobile work practices? How do mobility strategies facilitate or subvert the “do what you love” mantra that has come to dominate creative and knowledge economies (Duffy, 2018; McRobbie, 2016), contributing to the rise of an “entreprenariat” (Lorusso, 2016)? How does platform capitalism (Srnicsek, 2017) influence the way mobile persons enter the labour market? How do tightening migration regimes influence the precarious situation of mobile workers?

These are some of the issues that this workshop aims to tackle, hoping to build a comparative framework to understand socio-cultural and political changes.

We encourage case studies based on ethnographic research from social anthropology and cognate disciplines. We seek contributions that offer insight into the links between mobilities, work and the future and particularly welcome proposals from early and mid-career scholars. Possible topics could include (but are not limited to):

- Imaginations, hopes and aspirations in relation to mobility and work;
- Configurations of work-related mobile communities and social spaces;
- Perceptions of self in the context of mobile work (e.g. personal branding and identification of self in terms of market value);
- Gig economy and digital platforms as factors reshaping labour migration;
- Freedom to work, precarity of work: entrepreneurship and/or precariat in contexts of mobility?;
- Mobility and social justice.

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