

ILPC 2019 Special Stream No. 6

**‘Grey zones of work and employment in comparative perspective:  
The hybridisation of labour market statuses, individual careers and  
collective forms of representation’**

Stream Organisers:

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This stream focuses on work and employment relations in the hybrid areas of work. By hybridisation of work, we mean the blurring boundaries –both at the structural and at the cultural level– of working experiences and conditions that were earlier typical either of self-employment or of salaried employment. On the one side, holding multiple jobs –as self-employed, employee or in the informal economy– becomes more and more common as well as the intertwinement between work and private times and spaces. In this regard, the rise of the gig economy and of freelancing is making a significant contribution to the transformation of activities that traditionally relied on standard employment relations or informal activities into activities of self-employment. On the other side, the hybridisation of work is challenging the cultural repertoires about employment and self-employment and questioning the prevalence of the wage-earning model. Therefore, the traditional debates that tend to polarise the attention between the growing entrepreneurial culture and the desire for autonomy, on the one hand, and the increase of precariousness and vulnerability among self-employed workers, on the other, are not anymore able to capture the emerging identities that are constructed outside of the cultural frames of ‘precariousness’ and ‘entrepreneurship’.

By leveraging the concept of hybridisation, we aim to move forward from the debates on self-employment, freelancing and micro-enterprises, on the one side, and atypical jobs, bogus self-employment and precarity, on the other. In doing so, particular attention will be paid to both newly emerging aspects and continuities of the grey zones of work with respect to standard employment relations. In fact, new and unexpected factors are challenging everyday working lives and traditional employment relations, while at the same time old asymmetries remain unchanged, especially when considering the history of women, youth and migrants.

The focus on the grey zones of work and employment overlaps with important issues related to the analysis of the processes of deregulation and flexibilisation, particularly with the theme of the 2019 conference on “Fragmentations and Solidarities.” Hybridisation is a phenomenon that characterises the vulnerable and fragmented nature of contemporary labour, and that is also affecting the level of social protection, as well as at the level of existing forms of collective representation. The grey zone of work and employment approach enables to understand the unsteadiness, indetermination and uncertainty of current employment and work.

We welcome contributions that examine any of the following, or related, questions:

- How do the work arrangements in the grey zones of work and employment differ across the global landscape in terms of employment regulation and social protection?
- What range of tools and institutions can be envisaged to regulate work that falls outside the traditional regulatory repertoire of labour law? How to revise social protection systems? Do they need to be more inclusive?
- How are hybrid contractual arrangements classified by official statistics? Are they able to capture the heterogeneous composition of this group of workers?
- How are the grey zones of work configured in terms of gender, family status, migration status, ethnicity, national origin, class, age, skills and level of education?
- How is the hybridisation of work redefining the boundaries between work, leisure and private spheres? How is this phenomenon eroding the distinction between the times and spaces of life and work?
- How is the growing heterogeneity of labour reconfiguring spaces in terms of socio-spatial fragmentation and inequalities? How are territorial transformations changing working trajectories and how are workers able to appropriate the places they live and work in?
- What is the impact of technologically driven changes on the grey zones of work? How are online platforms redefining the boundaries between employment and self-employment?
- How do the subjects represent themselves and how are work identities constructed to create new and hybrid types of workers? Which different perspectives of worker subjectivities are emerging in the grey zones of work? How do they challenge the dichotomy between ‘precarisation’ and ‘entrepreneurialism’?
- How can workers with a hybrid status be assisted through collective representation? What is the position of trade unions and employer associations? Which is the role played by alternative organisations, such as labour market intermediaries, cooperatives, quasi-unions or grassroots movements in organising workers in the grey zones of work and employment? Are they able to create new forms of solidarity or do they exacerbate fragmentation?
- What theoretical lenses can be developed to provide more sophisticated analyses of the grey zones of work and employment? How can we theoretically challenge the dichotomic conceptual categories constructed by difference with respect to the Fordist model (standard/non-standard; typical/a-typical, etc.)?

The stream encourages comparative and interdisciplinary discussion, and we welcome submissions from fields such as sociology, cultural studies, economics, geography, labour law, political science, anthropology, social movements and industrial and employment relations.

Contributions can be theoretical or theoretically informed empirical work. We are particularly interested in submissions that advance our understanding of how the grey zones of work and employment are articulated in both the Global North and the Global South. Ulrich Beck, in his pioneer work on the new world of work, pointed out the risk of a ‘brazilianisation’ of the Occident. He meant that issues related to ‘informal sector’ approaches in the global South could contribute to understand tendencies in the North, in terms of privatisation of public services, commodification of social benefits, loss of the influence of the state, etc. Nowadays, recognising that common features exist between former forms of non-standard employment in the South (but not only) and ‘novel’ work arrangements, compels us to examine the new features of labour and employment relationships we have qualified as grey zones of work and employment, within a

general process of hybridisation of labour market statuses, individual careers and collective forms of representation.

We will explore possibilities to publish papers in a book or special issue of a journal after the conference.

**Please submit abstracts via the International Labour Process Conference website ([ilpc.org.uk](https://www.ilpc.org.uk)) by the deadline of 26 October 2018.**

For information on the ILPC 2019 and the Calls for Papers for the General Conference and the other Special Streams please go to <https://www.ilpc.org.uk/>