

Third Conference of the European Labour History Network (ELHN)

Amsterdam, 19-21 September 2019

Factory History Working Group Call for Papers

This call for paper aims to bring together historians and social scientists of different hues who study the factory in a historical perspective to discuss new research focused on the factory as a unit of analysis. The focus is on thematic and methodological perspectives that engage with dimensions such as gender, race, the spatial and transnational turn, the discourse analysis etc. that have cross-fertilised with the perspective of class that was traditionally adopted by the labour history of the factory.

Monographs on the factory were once frequent, and some were models of their genre, but they sometimes adopted an overly narrow industrial relations lens (or, worse, the hagiographic tone of a company history) that obfuscated what could be gained from an integrated, interdisciplinary and multi-focal gaze. We aim to foster a novel research agenda on the factory that would be located at the intersection of different disciplines and sub-disciplines, looking at a variety of agents, and crossing the boundaries of national historiographies of industrialization and de-industrialization.

While this perspective argues for a history of the factory that is interdisciplinary, labour historians have much to gain from it. As a field labour history has widened in scope in the past thirty years: the history of everyday life, of communities, of urban space, of gender and the reproductive sphere are now part and parcel of labour histories. These methodological and theoretical developments have had a tremendous influence on labour history. We look for contributions that build upon these developments and further encourage a dialogue between labour history and other fields. As a complex organization employing large number of workers the factory is a point of convergence of different social phenomena, some transnational in scope such as resources, employees and circulation of commodities. Studying a factory in all its aspects encompassing the transnational flows of capital and trade, internationally shaped investment decisions, the interactions between international and national regulation, national and international labour migration could move our research questions from the fallacies of a narrowly national focus.

We also recognise that the definition of factory is open to interpretation as models of organisation of production have been arguably adopted in the service sector (call centres) or in logistics and distribution (warehouses) where workers are highly regimented and constantly gauged against statistical performance standards, primarily speed. These workplaces adopt Taylorist practices that once characterized factory production, such as the strategic use of technology to control the pace of working and the fragmentation and mechanization of tasks to deskill workers. The onus is on the researcher to argue why a particular workplace should be considered a “factory” and benefit from intellectual dialogue with the papers of this working group.

We are calling for papers that focus on a factory or a coherent group of factories from any aspects, but in particular from an integrated, interdisciplinary and multi-focal gaze. Papers that deal with the

politics of the working-class in general, not linked to a particular factory, are better suited to other working groups in the European Labour History Network.

We invite proposals for papers and roundtables addressing one or more of the following themes:

- Social Relations of Production and the Workplace (technology, work groups, economic cycles and factory, working class formation, managerial models); Industrial Relations and The Workplace (Industrial conflict, working-class resistance, wages, the relevance of workplace politics and the connections between the workplace-based, 'economistic' forms of resistance and more explicitly political forms of rebellion)
- Factory Cultures (competing cultures within factory, cultures of work, factory and memory); factory and the production of difference (ethnicity and race, religion, gender, migration, generations, tasks and skills)
- State, Factory and Labour (intervention of political regime, legislation, policing and surveillance, institutions, citizenship and integration, state crisis and regime change)
- The Capital Side of the Story (financing, factory ownership patterns, investment decisions, rates of profit, socialist vs capitalist accumulation and the factory)
- The Factory and The City (neighbourhood, community, de/industrial landscapes, Social reproduction and factory labour, the relationship between a factory as built environment to its physical surrounding)
- The Factory and the Community (the political, social and cultural interaction between the workplace and the community it is embedded in, the actual and symbolic borders of factory as an industrial workplace)
- The Factory across Change and Continuity within Capitalism (Fordism and post-Fordism, and industrial and post-industrial capitalism, and deindustrialization on the level of the factory)
- The Factory in Various Levels of Analysis (the ways in which the local, regional, national and global connect to each other at the level of factory, global commodity chain, global production networks and global assembly line)

Please send your proposal (400 words max.) to both coordinators until 1st October 2018.

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(Please let the co-ordinators know if you want to join the ELHN Factory History Working Group email list)