

Call for papers for the Working Group *Factory History* (ELHN-WORCK Conference, Vienna, 30 August–3 September 2021)

Across the post-industrial divide: interdisciplinary perspectives on the global factory

Deadline: 25 September 2020

We invite proposals for papers and themed sessions for the Factory History sessions at ELHN-WORCK 2021, Vienna, 30 August–3 September 2021, to be submitted by 25 September 2020. Please send a max 400 words abstract of your proposal to Gorkem Akgoz, akgozgorkem@yahoo.com or Nico Pizzolato, n.pizzolato@mdx.ac.uk The proposal should include name, surname, current affiliation and contact details of the proponent.

The ELHN Factory History working group brings together, in an interdisciplinary fashion, recent historical, sociological, anthropological and visual work that present new methodological and epistemological perspectives on the study of capitalism at the point of production. With this call, we aim to bring together historians and social scientists of different hues, as well as museum curators, documentary filmmakers, to discuss new research and artefacts that focus on the past and present of the factory with a historical perspective. 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.

At ELHN 2021, we would like to build on two broad themes that came up in the working group discussions in the previous conferences. The first theme points towards the potential of cross-fertilization between history and other disciplines, from anthropology to organisational studies, from museum curatorship to documentary filmmaking to digital humanists, which have brought to the fore the factory as a key place to understand the workings of capitalism. Interdisciplinarity in the factory-level analysis equips scholars to question the models of linear and uniform development of capitalism. We need to ask, first and foremost, to what extent the model of factory as the place where the real subsumption of labour is exhibited in Taylorist discipline represents factories in the past and present. Finally, we need to examine how factory work relates to forms of labour subsumed merely formally to capital such as putting-put work and varieties of debt-bound petty commodity production. The assumption of the Fordist factory as the place of standardized employment needs to be questioned. The renewed interest in factories within the discipline of industrial anthropology raises important questions for historians in this respect.

The second broad theme can be defined as “historicizing the global factory.” The starting point for this theme is the persistence of manufacturing in developed economies and its expansion in many ‘developing’ countries. The relocation of industrial production created more factory jobs in developing economies without entirely destroying them in the developed world. Manufacturing has increased as a proportion of GDP in many middle-income developing economies and is central to their ‘development’ despite their allegedly decreased ability to boost economic growth. We argue that the factory, rather than disappearing, has gone ‘global’, with a production process often dislocated across several countries. Sporadically, as with the Rana Plaza disaster and the worker suicides in Chinese multinationals, the global factory enters the western public’s awareness in the twenty-first century. In fact, the factory as a model for the organization of production has been adopted within the service sector (call centres) and logistics and distribution (warehouses) where workers are highly regimented and their activities constantly measured against metric performance standards, provoking arguments that they constitute the present-day ‘Satanic mills’. These workplaces adopt the use of technology to control the pace of work and the fragmentation and mechanization of tasks to raise productivity while deskilling workers. The warehouses often are referred to as ‘future factories’; they even bear the signs

of another industrial transformation where the old but not aging narrative of full automation finally is being realized. More widely, the factory nexus in transnationally-networked value chains is vital to how global capitalism connects distant localities and people into integrated processes.

Some possible cross-cutting themes are:

- Transfer of Industrial Knowledge and Technology (scientific management, circulation of expertise, technology and forms of organization, migration, capital flows);
- 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)
- Precarity and Industrial Work (how low pay, few employment rights, faux self-employment, coercive labour from Foxconn to Bangladeshi garment factories to the US Federal Prison Industries have reshaped the factory floor).
- Industrial Work and Digital Humanities (using digital media to connect the industrialist and de-industrialised pasts, online exhibits on factories and industrial labour, creating online teaching platforms on varieties of industrial development)

Please note that 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.

About the Factory History Working Group

The working group has existed since 2014 and will continue its activities in the future with conference panels, publications and funding bids. Next on the agenda is a digital humanities project that will connect the different research of our members. The group is truly international and far-flung; it includes scholars at various stages in their respective careers and in a number of academic disciplines; it has assembled a solid library of working papers and primary materials; and it possesses an abundance of energy and vision. A robust digital platform will raise the network's visibility, facilitate off-site communication across multiple time zones, and provide a platform for collaborative research and writing. We are also working on a networking funding bid and on a podcast series. If you would

like to join us or receive news from the group, please send an email to one of the co-ordinators at akgozgorkem@yahoo.com or n.pizzolato@mdx.ac.uk.

Location

The Fourth Conference of the European Labour History Network (ELHN) will take place, from **30 August to 3 September 2021**, in Vienna, at Vienna University.

As there are uncertainties due to Covid-19, also indicate whether you would be willing to give your presentation via an online session.

Gorkem Akgoz, re:work, Humboldt University

Nico Pizzolato, Middlesex University