

Call for Papers

‘The circulation of ideas and practices regarding workplace democracy in Europe and beyond, from WWII to the present’

International conference, Université d’Évry Paris-Saclay, 28-29 September 2023

Throughout the 20th century, workplace democracy has been a vibrant idea that encompassed a broad spectrum of meanings – from workers’ self-management to collective bargaining, from co-determination to wage-earner funds – and extended to different levels – from shop-floor to enterprise, industry, national and transnational economic level. It has fostered countless labour struggles, concrete management experiences and policy proposals in Europe, especially since the Second World War: one can think of workers’ councils during and after the war, the laws introducing ‘*Mitbestimmung*’ in West Germany from the 1950s onwards, the workers’ occupation of the LIP factory in France in 1973, the Meidner Plan to socialise capital through collective wage funds in the 1970s in Sweden, or the introduction of European Works Councils by the European Union in 1994. Two ‘models’ of workplace democracy are usually considered to have been the most widely discussed in postwar Europe: the French model of ‘*autogestion*’, particularly influenced by the Yugoslav experience of self-management (Georgi 2018), and the German model of co-determination. The idea, however, seems to have lost ground from the 1980s onwards; today, hierarchical forms of organisation remain dominant in the private and public economic landscape, and workplace democracy commands only scant attention in the media and in public life.

In recent years there are signs that the theme of workplace democracy is getting new traction, at least in academia. A wide array of new publications appears in many different disciplines such as political theory (Anderson 2017, Singer 2018), social and political science (Landemore and Ferreras 2016), legal theory (Ackerman 2017, Ciepley 2013), economy (Mellizo 2017, Dow 2019), management (Wilkinson 2010; Grandori 2020), work psychology (Unterreiner et al. 2011) and history (Berger et al. 2019; Azzellini and Ness 2011). Last year, a ‘Global Forum on Democratizing Work’ gathered together hundreds of scholars from around the world. Except for some rare exceptions (Georgi 2018, Zaccaria 2018), however, few historical works address the history of workplace democracy from a transnational or global perspective.

This conference therefore aims to explore the circulations of ideas and practices of workplace democracy on a European and global scale from WWII to the present. We are particularly interested in transnational and comparative studies that examine the role of trade unions and academic circles in such circulations, but we also invite contributions looking at the role of other actors (scholars, intellectuals, journalists; political actors, parties and networks; governmental actors; NGOs; employers’ federations and business actors; international organisations; etc.). The main research questions that we want to ask are: How did the circulation of ideas across countries shape different actors’ positions concerning workplace democracy? Besides ‘*autogestion*’ and ‘*Mitbestimmung*’, what other models of workplace democracy were debated and transferred across national borders, in Europe and beyond? How did trade-union and other actors’ discourses take academic production into account, and *vice versa*? How and through which channels did ideas of workplace democracy circulate, how did influences occur (exchanges, study trips, the organisation of conferences, symposiums, the publication of books, pamphlets, etc.)? Which individuals and institutions played the most important role in the circulation of ideas? How did co-determination, self-management or other ‘models’ influence discussions, proposals and concrete measures regarding workplace democracy at the European or international levels, such as the European Works Councils?

We invite papers based on new empirical research that contribute to the writing of a comparative, transnational and global history of workplace democracy. Our aim is to work

towards a collective volume based on the conference proceedings. The conference organisers are Aurélie Andry and Frank Georgi (Université d'Évry Paris-Saclay), Sophia Friedel and Stefan Berger (Ruhr University in Bochum). The conference will take place in Évry on 28-29 September 2023 (arrival on Wednesday 27 September). The main language will be English, but we are hoping to accommodate participants who would prefer to intervene in other languages. Abstracts (max 400 words) and a short CV must be submitted to Aurélie Andry and Sophia Friedel at aurelie.andry@univ-evry.fr and sophia.friedel@ruhr-uni-bochum.de by 31 January 2023. Participants will be notified in March 2023, and are expected to submit their papers two weeks in advance of the conference. As much as possible, we will try to cover travel and accommodation expenses. This conference is organised in the framework of the research project Workplace democracy: a European ideal? Discourses and practices about the democratization of work after 1945 ([EURO-DEM](#)) led by Stefan Berger and Roberto Frega (Centre Marc Bloch, Berlin). The project is funded by the ANR and DFG.