



## VII International Conference

### **Social Boundaries of Work. Critical Labour Studies in the Times of a Polycrisis**

**Institute of Sociology, University of Wrocław 16-18 October 2024**

The **Department of the Sociology of Work and Economic Sociology at the Institute of Sociology of the University of Wrocław, the Sociology of Work Section of the Polish Sociological Association, the Critical Labour Studies Network**, the Wrocław branch of the Polish Sociological Association and the Research Committee 44 "Labour Movements" of the International Sociological Association invite you to participate in the international conference entitled "*Social Boundaries of Work. Critical Labour Studies in the Times of a Polycrisis*", to be held in Wrocław on 16-18 October 2024.

The seventh edition of the conference is co-organised with the Critical Labour Studies network (<https://criticallabourstudies.org.uk/>). CLS was established in 2004 as a collective to provide a platform for co-operative and radical research and education. Within the academy the network spans the social sciences in the field of work and employment but this is only one of its characteristic features. It also includes a range of activists well beyond the academy in both traditional and alternative social and labour movements. The meetings also bring together musicians, theatre activists and radical painters from different continents. The network is distinguished by a commitment to the co-production of research, publication,

dissemination, public engagement, learning and pedagogic innovation. During the conference in Wroclaw, the network will celebrate its 20th anniversary.

The conference is dedicated to analysing the relationship between academia and the world of work in the context of overlapping and reinforcing socio-economic crises. The COVID-19 pandemic was not only a profound crisis of public health, but also of public services and the social security systems which have been under pressure for years from neoliberal reforms. The escalation of armed conflicts in Europe as a result of Russia's full-scale attack on Ukraine only exacerbated the refugee movements that had been underway for years. The post-pandemic reality is also marked by a cost-of-living crisis that has deepened existing social inequalities and the impoverishment of many groups of workers.

Against the backdrop of more recent and medium-term crises such as the pandemic and war, a long-term climate crisis is underway, which is leading to discussions about the need to restructure certain industries. Add to that the challenges of the digital transformation, which may not only render some jobs obsolete but also change the balance of power in the labour market. The consequences of the crises extend to both production and social reproduction. The disruption of work-life balance, the need for self-discipline in the organisation of remote work, and the rapid development of technologies for the control and supervision of workers are becoming increasingly evident. Something more, since 2019 the green transition has been recognized as a major priority for Europe, but its impacts on work and employment could be ambiguous, especially in regions dependent on traditional industries and energy sources, creating massive social discontent. At the same time, we are witnessing the progressive marketisation of basic public services. An example of the overlapping crises in the spheres of production and reproduction is precisely the increase in unpaid work, including not only care work but also the work required to find and maintain employment (work for labour) or the so-called prosumer work.

Existing research clearly confirms that underprivileged groups in the labour market (young people, migrants, people with disabilities), often found in low-paid and precarious jobs that are essential to the daily functioning of society, are particularly hard hit by the crises. The polycrisis also has a gendered dimension, as manifested, for example, in the unequal burden of care work, in the demands faced by essential / key workers in female dominated occupations, or finally in the restructuring of manufacturing jobs. As a consequence of the neo-liberal reforms superimposed on the autocratic management of science in many countries, the academic world is also becoming increasingly precarious, with growing inequalities both between countries and universities and within the university. In an environment of increasing competition and the need to fight for one's livelihood, academics find it increasingly difficult to engage in the public life.

In this conference, we want to look at the interplay of between the worlds of academia and labour under the conditions of the polycrisis outlined above. We associate the critical potential of labour studies with analyses that without resigning from a rigorous scientific apparatus go beyond the strict division between the worlds of the researched and the researchers. In keeping with the tradition of previous editions of the Social Boundaries of Work conference, we continue the multifaceted conversation and exchange between those representing the worlds of academia, labour activism and the media. We assume that critical research seeks to develop practices and recommendations that improve various dimensions of job quality and, in the long term, aims to remodel the social system in the spirit of social justice, egalitarianism and solidarity. The conference will seek answers to the following questions:

- What are the main areas of interest in contemporary critical labour studies?
- How are the boundaries between critical and traditional approaches in the sociology of work constructed?
- What is the relevance of social research for the world of work in a situation of increasing uncertainty and overlapping socio-economic problems?
- What traditional and new methodologies should be used in research to avoid creating barriers between those employed in academia and those working in other sectors, while still maintaining the rigour of academic research?
- How to effectively translate critical diagnoses of the situation in the world of work into collective action, shaped by trade unions or new forms of interest representation?
- What is the role of academic and non-academic experts within trade unions and employers' organisations?
- How can the knowledge and experiences of representatives of labour movements translate into the organisation of the interests of underprivileged groups in academia?
- How can critical labour studies conceptualise the notion of crisis? How do the different worlds (academia, media, activism) intersect? What do they expect from each other? How can they communicate with each other effectively?

We encourage applications from both academics and social practitioners representing trade unions, labour movements but also employers' organisations. Those representing the labour journalism circles community are also welcome to participate.

The conference is divided into two parts. The first part, scheduled for 16 October 2024, will be dedicated to meetings, workshops and papers with people representing workers' and employers' organisations, organised in the framework of projects: (1) the European Research Council (ERC Advanced Grant), grant agreement n° 833577 - Project ResPecTMe

(Researching precariousness across the paid/unpaid work continuum, PI: Valeria Pulignano (KU Leuven), <https://soc.kuleuven.be/ceso/wo/erlm/respectme> ) - Awareness Workshop; (2) NCN OPUS project 'COV-WORK: Socio-economic awareness, work experiences and coping strategies of Poles in the context of the post-pandemic crisis', funded by National Science Centre (NCN contract no. UMO-2020/37/B/HS6/00479, Co-PIs: Adam Mrozowski (University of Wrocław), Jan Czarzasty (SGH Warsaw School of Economics) <https://covwork.uwr.edu.pl/> ) – multi-industry seminar and closing conference (3) international project 'ENDURE: Inequalities and Social Resilience and New Modalities of Governance in a Post-Pandemic World" (PI: Mihai Varga, Freie Universität Berlin), co-funded by the National Science Centre (PI of the Polish team: Mateusz Karolak, University of Wrocław) under the Trans-Atlantic Platform for Social Sciences and Humanities (T-AP) network (<https://www.endure-project.org/>). The Open Day is mostly focus on the Polish audience and it will be held in Polish (with a possibility of translation to English - TBC).

The seminars and workshops on the first day of the conference are open to all interested parties without charge, but please register for the event. **The seminars in the first day of the conference will be held in Polish.** The organisers will endeavour to make the sessions (or parts of them) accessible to a foreign audience.

The second part of the conference (fully in English) will take place on 17-18 October 2024 and will be based on the submissions of abstracts. A detailed submission schedule can be found below:

- **1 March 2024** - paper submissions via conference form (please include: name and affiliations of referees, affiliations, email, title of paper, abstract (250-500 words) – please use the form: <https://forms.gle/ufR2YxjtLcXUQZzh8>
- **15 April 2024** - announcement of the list of accepted abstracts (evaluation is made by the organising committee and the conference scientific council)
- **31 May 2024** - deadline for payment of the conference fee

We are open to thematic group proposals, which should be sent to the conference organisers at [socialboundariesofwork@gmail.com](mailto:socialboundariesofwork@gmail.com) by **15 January 2024**. The thematic group submission should include: name and affiliations of the persons organising the group, email, group title, abstract (300-500 words). Optionally, you can also indicate a proposal for papers in the group with the names and affiliations of the speakers. We will inform the organisers of the acceptance of the group by **1 February 2024**, simultaneously providing information about it on the conference website.

The conference organizers have established cooperation with two Polish journals (Górnośląskie Studia Socjologiczne and Przegląd Socjologii Jakościowej), where it will be possible to publish selected papers after positive reviews.

### **Conference fees**

Participation with paper:

Fee for academic staff and other participants with permanent affiliation:

- PLN 600 / EUR 130 (fee includes conference materials, coffee breaks, lunch and gala dinner);
- 450 PLN / 100 EUR (fee includes conference materials, coffee breaks, lunch but does not include dinner)

Fee for doctoral students:

- PLN 400 / EUR 85 (fee includes conference materials, coffee breaks, lunch and gala dinner);
- 250 PLN / 55 EUR (fee includes conference materials, coffee breaks, lunch but does not include gala dinner)

Participation in plenary sessions and workshops with practitioners is free of charge. However, please register in advance (participation does not include paper presentations, conference materials, lunch and gala dinner).

Conference registration and abstract submissions can be made via the form: <https://forms.gle/ufR2YxitLcXUQZzh8>

Please address any questions to the conference address: [socialboundariesofwork@gmail.com](mailto:socialboundariesofwork@gmail.com)

### **Conference organising committee**

Chair: dr hab. Adam Mrozowski, Prof. UWr

Co-Chair: dr Agata Krasowska (University of Wrocław)

Co-Chair: prof. Paul Stewart (Grenoble Ecole de Management)

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dr hab. Bartosz Mika (University of Gdańsk)  
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dr Piotr Pieńkowski (University of Wrocław)  
dr Szymon Pilch ((University of Wrocław)  
dr hab. Dominika Polkowska (Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin)  
dr Katarzyna Rabiej-Sienicka (University of Warsaw)  
mgr Wiktor Sokół (University of Gdańsk)

### **Scientific Council of the conference**

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dr Brian Garvey, University of Strathclyde  
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