



8th International Conference

Social Boundaries of Work

The Meanings of Work in Organizational Contexts

Book of Abstracts

21–23 October 2026 | Łódź, Poland

University of Lodz
Faculty of Economics and Sociology

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Sessions

Opening session: Life and experiencing of work in the city of Lodz

21 October 2026 | 13.15–14.45

Moderator: Beata Pawłowska (University of Lodz)

OPPENING SESSION:

Life and experience of work in the city of Lodz

Mariusz Sokołowicz (University of Lodz):

The Death and Life of a (Not-So-Great, Non-American) City: Shifts in Experiencing Work in Lodz

During the nineteenth century, Lodz transformed from a small town into one of Central and Eastern Europe’s largest industrial centers. Driven by textile production and migration, it became heterogeneous, dynamic, and overwhelming - like an American city. Paraphrasing Jane Jacobs, I will try to explore the “death and life” of this non-American city through changing experiences of work.

I will trace three major transformations. During the 19th-century industrialization, predominantly rural migrants entered factories, becoming industrial workers almost overnight. Factory labor reorganized their routines and identities while shaping urban space, social hierarchies, and collective life.

After the Second World War, Lodz became a city with an almost entirely reconstituted population. Under state socialism, large textile factories functioned not only as workplaces but also as institutions providing welfare, housing, and collective identity.

The collapse of the textile industry in the 1990s brought another radical change. Thousands, particularly women, lost jobs previously regarded as permanent. Factories gave way to services, education, scientific research, logistics and entrepreneurship. The symbolic one-night shift from the textile factory to the university, as a major employer, illustrates the broader redefinition of work experiences and of the city itself.

Such work transformations went beyond the labor market: they reshaped urban space, everyday life, social identities, and collective memory. Successive regimes of work have repeatedly altered what it means to live and work in Lodz.

Artur Parys (University of Lodz):

The Everyday Work and Lives of Women Textile Workers

In 1969, the Łódź photojournalist Włodzimierz Parys photographed women employed at the Marchlewski Cotton Industry Plant, one of the major textile factories in the city. Reflecting on his practice, Parys stated: “I wanted to show these women as they were in their everyday lives, not on special occasions or posing for the photographer.” This article takes that statement as both a documentary credo and a historiographical problem: What dimensions of women’s labor become visible when working-class life is approached through everyday practices rather than through official narratives of socialist production?

Drawing on a family archive of photographs rediscovered after fifty years, the presentation analyzes images taken inside textile production halls and workers’ apartments connected to the factory. These photographs are read alongside a retrospective oral-history interview with Jadwiga Pawłowska-Kwaśniak, who worked in the factory’s cultural institution and accompanied Parys during part of his photographic documentation. The presentation also asks how visual sources and oral testimony can recover forms of female industrial experience that were often flattened in official representations of the socialist woman worker.

The analysis focuses on three interconnected spaces: the factory floor, where women’s bodies, gestures, work clothing, and proximity to machines reveal the material and embodied character of textile labor; the workers’ apartments, where domestic interiors show the living conditions that shaped women’s everyday lives beyond the workplace; and the institutional space of factory cultural lifeexemplified by photographs of Pawłowska-Kwaśniak posed at the factory’s main gate in the original folk costume of the Poltex dance ensemble, the plant’s official troupe - which addressed workers’ cultural needs and connected work, memory, and working-class identity. This combination of visual sources, oral history, and photo elicitation makes it possible to reconstruct not only what the photographs depict but also the social relations, institutional practices, and everyday experiences that surrounded their creation. Rather than treating the factory floor as the sole site of working-class history, it reconstructs the everyday worlds of textile workers across interconnected spaces of production, domestic life, and factory-based cultural activity.

Social Boundaries of Work 2026 Łódź, Poland

Opening session: Life and experiencing of work in the city of Lodz

21 October 2026 | 13.15–14.45

Moderator: Beata Pawłowska (University of Lodz)

Krzysztof Konecki and team. Waldemar Dymarczyk, Krzysztof Konecki, Hanna Krocak, Łukasz Marciniak, Jakub Niedbalski, Beata Pawłowska, Aleksandra Płaczek, Piotr Statucki, Izabela Ślęzak, Dagmara Tarasiuk (University of Lodz):

I Live at Work. Contemplative Research on Work in a Contemporary Academic Institution in Poland

This paper is a collective attempt at a critical-contemplative explanation of work in the contemporary academy.

Our presentation will focus on a form of contemplative explanation of three moments related to work: entering the workplace, performing an activity at work, and finally, leaving the workspace. These three moments were described in the self-observations of research and teaching staff at a department of a large state university.

The self-observations were conducted in accordance with the principles of contemplative research, in which the subject observes their own thoughts, emotions, and bodily sensations as they experience a specific phenomenon or moment in time during an activity. We believe that learning about the world is experiential in nature, also framed by presuppositions, which become the subject of reconstruction for the research participants.

Next, the self-observations were reflected upon in the form of contemplative notes that aim to explain employees' experiences in the academic space, considering the feelings generated during the writing process. In this paper, we will present the experiential dimension of the workplace from the first-person perspectives of individual employees, as well as the reconstructed presuppositions that frame these experiences. This paper is a preliminary summary of the shared perspective developed through the collective writing of contemplative notes in the final phase of the study.

PLENARY SESSION 1: “Work, Emotions and Politics in the Late Capitalism”

21 October 2026 | 17.30–19.00 | ROOM: C101

Chair: Beata Pawłowska (University of Lodz)

PLENARY SESSION 1:

Work, Emotions and Politics in the Late Capitalism

Arlie Hochschild (University of California, Berkeley):

Politics as Emotional Capture: What We Can Learn [online]

How, I ask, did Donald Trump “emotionally capture” a sector of Americans who remain devoted to him as he pursues his right-wing agenda. Based on field work in the coal fields of Appalachia, in the whitest and second poorest congressional district in the US, I describe the conditions of loss and fear of loss that make a given population “ready to hear” what he says. I then describe the three steps of emotional capture—a) an appeal of recognition, b) an invitational narrative of stolen pride, and c) a continually reenacted “anti-shaming ritual.” Through his he channels shame to blame at various out-groups—immigrants, universities, the media, and others. I end by suggesting ways emotional capture is best countered.

Krzysztof Konecki (University of Lodz):

Emotions and the mood in the neoliberal society

I focus my presentation on the sociological analysis of emotions in contemporary capitalistic societies. First, I focus on Arlie Hochschild’s sociological concept of stolen pride. Later, I look at the emotions from the perspective of philosopher Byung-Chul Han, which gives me the conceptual tools for analysing and contemplating the issues of emotions (pride and shame, but also the emotions connected with narcissism, depression, disappointment, happiness, hedonism, pain, and others) in the pride economy, which is currently experiencing crises. I also analyse hope for the future and the possibilities for change in societies and economies facing political, ecological, and planetary challenges. The conclusions will relate to my contemplative proposal to explicate emotions in neoliberal society, especially the neoliberal dispositif of happiness that centres on the ego. I also use contemplative art as a tool for explicating and understanding/feeling the mood. I try to explicate emotions as inauthentic/authentic experiences, as the illusions created by the so-called society, together with holders of power to regulate social relations, mainly in work situations and institutions, and in the domain of politics. The contemplation will be conducted at the individual and social levels (das Man).

PLENARY SESSION 2: The Meanings of Work and Technological Change

22 October 2026 | 09.00–11.00 | ROOM: C101
Chair: Adam Mrozowski (University of Wrocław)

PLENARY SESSION 2:
The Meanings of Work and Technological Change

Dominika Polkowska (Maria Curie-Skłodowska University); **Bartosz Mika** (University of Gdańsk):

What Happens When Platforms Mature? Worker Trajectories in Algorithmically Managed Labour

Research on platform labour has largely focused on precarity, algorithmic control, and regulatory debates during the early expansion of digital labour platforms. Much less attention has been paid to what happens when platforms cease to be disruptive newcomers and instead become stable and institutionally embedded actors. Drawing on long-term research on ride-hailing drivers and food-delivery couriers in Poland, this keynote examines platform labour in its phase of organisational maturity. In our view, it is time to move beyond the language of novelty and disruption and recognise that most on-demand labour platforms have now existed for over a decade. Their presence in the labour market has become normalised, and work mediated by platforms has reshaped the specific sectors in which they operate. The talk argues that once platforms stabilise as labour market institutions, the key analytical question shifts from whether platform work is precarious to how workers position themselves within this labour regime over time. Rather than treating platform workers as a homogeneous category, the presentation introduces the original T-A-S-K typology, a framework capturing distinct trajectories through which workers engage with platform labour. Drawing on quantitative analyses and tracing these trajectories in qualitative material, we develop a new typology of platform work. These trajectories range from workers trapped in flexibility, whose livelihoods gradually become dependent on platform income, through Committed Workers and the Unanchored of Flexibility, to comfort-oriented Platformers, who treat platform work as an opportunistic and temporary activity. By identifying patterned trajectories of engagement with platform labour, the proposed framework shows how mature platforms generate differentiated worker experiences, expectations, and strategies. The T-A-S-K typology provides a new analytical lens for understanding how workers navigate and interpret algorithmically managed labour in mature platform economies.

Edoardo Mollona (University of Bologna):

The Struggle Over the Meaning of Work in the Platform Economy

This study examines how public discourse surrounding the platform economy conceptualizes work. Drawing on an empirical analysis of a corpus of about 90’000 articles extracted from a sample of newspapers from 17 European countries in the period 2007-2020, the research investigates the competing narratives through which the concept of labor in the platform economy is represented and interpreted. The findings reveal a fundamental tension between two dominant frames. On the one hand, work in the platform economy is portrayed as a historically unprecedented opportunity for learning, flexibility, and the valorization of individual skills. On the other hand, a critical perspective highlights the contradictions inherent in labor in the platform economy, emphasizing processes of material exploitation carried out by large corporations — most notably Amazon. These divergent representations are interpreted as part of a broader struggle over the meaning of work, which can be understood as a Gramscian “war of position.” In this sense, public discourse becomes a key arena in which competing actors attempt to shape hegemonic understandings of labor in the contemporary economy.

Charles Umney (Leeds University Business School):

Technological frames of reference and the development of the logistics industry in Northern England

The theme of my talk will be extending the range of actors engaged in sociological analyses of technology and the future of work. I will discuss recent research which interrogates assumptions and priorities that managers and technological developers assign to workplace technologies, presenting evidence from UK warehousing. I will show how we have sought to distinguish different managerial “frames of reference” in relation to technology in warehousing workplaces, each entailing different approaches to technological implementation and, critically, different ways of conceiving workers’ agency in relation to it. From here, I will also consider the role of the state, considering how state actors can act to shape the relationship between technology and the future of work, and highlighting the damage done by decades of marketisation in “hollowing out” state regulatory capacity. All of these comments will be based on our research team at Leeds’s investigation into the experience of the warehousing industry in Yorkshire, England.

PLENARY SESSION 3: The Social and Political Boundaries of Productive and Reproductive Work

22 October 2026 | 14.15–16.15 | ROOM: C101

Chair: Julia Kubisa (University of Warsaw)

PLENARY SESSION 3:

The Social and Political Boundaries of Productive and Reproductive Work

Oksana Dutchak (Institute for Systemic Alternatives):

Building Hierarchies and Sustaining Disposability: Systemic Boundaries of Care (and Love)

We care for others because it is the fundamental prerequisite of physical and social survival, and because of human affections of love, devotion and responsibility. But by caring, we also reproduce the key elements of the socio-economic system: labor power and social fabric. Being part of social reproduction, care is subjugated to the necessities of production; rooted in patriarchal division of labor, it is overwhelmingly feminized. These systemic features of care hierarchize and devalue it: some segments of care labor are more important for the socio-economic system, while others are treated as disposable. In this contribution I explore how care hierarchies and gendered affections are building boundaries of care to contain, discipline and (super)exploit care labor.

Anne Gravelle Antoni (Grenoble School of Management):

Moral Meanings of Work and Life: The Place of Care in Work Organisations

The struggle for meaningful work should be understood as part of the struggle for living meaningful lives. Workers endeavour to care for themselves and for others through work, which entails addressing affective and physical needs. Yet, because of structural and normative conditions of work in the capitalist and managerialist regime, they often fail to do so. A feminist ethics of care lens allows unveiling which needs for care are being attended to when working and which needs are being ignored. Care is constrained by structural (i.e. time and space) and symbolic (i.e. moral responsibilities) boundaries between the work and the nonwork. This renders care work particularly precarious, whether in its ‘private’ or ‘professional’ form. Solidarity is a necessary way forward for a just and democratic allocation of care responsibilities and labour but is also limited by social boundaries of work. Drawing on studies in different work organisations (in social work, advertising, and higher education), I will discuss how the place of care and solidarity is constrained by moral constructions of the meaning of work and labour.

Devi Sacchetto (University of Padua):

The Politics of Work: Producing Meaning, Producing Workers

This paper contests the contemporary debates on the meaning of work asking why work must be meaningful at all. Human beings require activity, cooperation, and social production, but they don’t require wage labour. Wage labour is a historically specific form of organizing human activity. While in Western societies, work has been considered a central source of identity and status promising individual dignity, inclusion and even redemption, in state socialist societies work was a collective duty and a fundamental contribution to the building of the “new society”. In an attempt to legitimise their system both capitalist and socialist countries promoted work through different narratives: one based on individual realisation and meritocracy, the other on collective purpose and social obligation. Drawing on qualitative research I conducted across different contexts in Western and Eastern Europe with local and migrant workers, trade unionists, managers and other key informants I will highlight how workers in different labour regimes build their own meanings of life, and in doing so also redefine the place of wage labour within it, sometimes distancing themselves from dominant narratives that equate work with dignity, identity, and moral worth. Instead of treating work as a natural source of value, this paper aims to see “the meaning of work” as a political project – one that obscures the asymmetries of power embedded in wage labour itself.

PLENARY SESSION 4: Critical Labour Studies: Traditions East and West.

23 October 2026 | 12.00–13.00 | ROOM: C101

Chair: Paul Stewart (KU Leuven)

PLENARY SESSION 4:

Critical Labour Studies: Traditions East and West.

Katarzyna Rakowska (University of Warsaw):

Being a Researcher and an Activist in a Grassroots Radical Union: A Two-Way Street

This paper focuses on the dynamic interplay between academic research and trade union activism through the lens of boundary-crossing practices in a grassroots radical union in Poland. I analyze how knowledge, networks, and resources flow bidirectionally between academic and union spheres, creating mutual benefits while challenging traditional institutional boundaries. The study demonstrates how such crossovers can strengthen both the trade union and academic research, focusing on how critical diagnoses of work can directly inform collective action. By evaluating the tensions and synergies of maintaining dual roles as researcher-activists, I argue that non-incorporated, boundary-crossing practices offer a vital counter-movement against marketized constraints in both academia and the broader labor landscape.

Jo Cutter (University of Leeds):

Critical Labour Studies and Worker Environmentalisms

This paper will focus on research and researcher activism within the CLS tradition at the intersection of human–nature exploitation and worker responses to the climate and environmental crises. A rich body of academic research has begun to examine how workers are impacted by and collectively engage with climate politics and the so-called just transition. Yet, there is considerable scope to enhance CLS to further embed principles of democratic research design, translate/transform research in support of alternative approaches to worker and student learning on environmental issues at and beyond the workplace and connect local and global dimensions of worker-led climate and environmental action. Building on examples of researcher-activism within trade unions and the academy the paper considers the challenges and opportunities for the advancing the contribution of CLS to worker-led climate responses.

CLOSING SESSION: The Right to Strike or the Freedom to Strike? A Discussion on Industrial Democracy with Trade Union Representatives

23 October 2026 | 14.00–15.30 | Room C101

Moderator: Katarzyna Rakowska (University of Warsaw)

23 October 2026 | 13.00–13.30 | Room C101

CLOSING SESSION:

The Right to Strike or the Freedom to Strike? A Discussion on Industrial Democracy with Trade Union Representatives

Session held in Polish

Panellists

Wojciech Jendrusiak (OPZZ Konfederacja Pracy w Handlu),

Urszula Łobodzińska (court employees’ trade union KNSZZ “Ad Rem”)

Mariusz Piotrowski (OZZ Inicjatywa Pracownicza workplace committee at Jeremias Sp. z o.o.)

Thematic grups

G-I: Theorising the Social Boundaries of Work: Structures, Institutions, Practices and Meanings in the World of Work

21 October 2026 | 15.15–17.00 | Room C-101

Chair: Agata Krasowska (University of Wrocław)

Adam Mrozowicki (University of Wrocław):

Biographical perspectives on the social boundaries of work

The goal of this paper is to discuss the opportunities offered by the autobiographical narrative interviews method developed by Fritz Schütze for studying the social boundaries of work. The latter denote the socially constructed distinctions between work and non-work that are embedded in existing structural and institutional orders, discourses, and sense-making practices. Life histories allow us to examine these boundaries by documenting the complex connections between the working and non-working lives of research participants within and beyond workplaces from subjective and processual perspectives. Combining reflections from biographical sociology with interpretative and feminist traditions in the sociology of work that redefine work beyond gainful employment, the paper first introduces the concept of social boundaries in work. Next, drawing on the author's research projects with young precarious workers in Poland and Germany in the late 2010s, and with essential workers in Poland and the USA during the 2020–21 pandemic, the article focuses on two cases of boundary-making practices: (1) the biographical normalisation of precarious employment reflecting negotiated boundaries between precarious and non-precarious employment among young workers; and (2) the development of biographical resources at the boundary of paid and unpaid work among care workers in Poland and the United States before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. The research suggests that overlapping chronic and sudden crises reinforce the blurring of the social boundaries of work within the analysed dimensions. The blurring of the boundaries between paid and unpaid work, and between precarious and standard employment is an important aspect of the normalisation of crises. The chapter concludes that biographical analysis is a useful methodological tool for exploring the interplay of structures, institutions, and worker agency in negotiating and navigating the social boundaries of work in contemporary capitalism.

Katarzyna Zajda (University of Lodz); **Wojciech Knieć** (Nicolaus Copernicus University):

When Work Conditions Matter: Social Boundaries and the Innovation Capacity of Rural NGOs

This paper examines the social boundaries of work in rural non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and their implications for the implementation of social innovation by NGOs. It draws on empirical research conducted in 2026 among leaders of NGOs operating in rural communities of the Partnerstwo Duchą Gór region in Lower Silesia (Poland). The study explores how specific working conditions in the rural third sector shape everyday organisational practices and influence the capacity for social innovation.

The analysis is based on qualitative data collected through in-depth unstructured interviews (IDI) with NGO leaders. It focuses on key challenges characteristic of rural NGOs, including financial instability, project-based funding, shortages of active members and volunteers, and the concentration of responsibilities in the hands of a small number of highly committed individuals. These conditions contribute to the precarious character of NGO work and blur the boundaries between paid employment, voluntary engagement, and private life.

Special attention will be paid to the temporal dimension of work. The findings will show if: 1. most rural NGO activity is embedded in short-term time horizons shaped by grant cycles and uncertainty, which strongly affect planning practices and forms of innovation, and 2. the specificity of the region and the activity of professionalised NGOs alter the temporal narrative within which rural NGOs operate.

The analysis is grounded in the theory of structuration and the social concept of time, enabling an examination of how agency and structure interact to produce and reproduce the social boundaries of NGO work in rural contexts.

G-I: Theorising the Social Boundaries of Work: Structures, Institutions, Practices and Meanings in the World of Work

21 October 2026 | 15.15–17.00 | Room C-101

Chair: Agata Krasowska (University of Wrocław)

Atanas Kotov (University of Manchester):

Reconceptualising informality in employment relations – the case of Bulgaria

Informality in the literature on management and employment relations is often conceptualised as either illegality or as a managerial tool. It is often characterised by its relation to monetary relations, be it wages, social security contributions or taxes. Examples include “envelope wages” and “shadow economy” where informality refers to untaxed or hidden economic transactions. The other prominent framing of informality is as the elimination of bureaucracy, often related to tasks and roles. Prominent in the HRM literature, it is viewed in a utilitarian, management focused way to “meet strategic ends” or “increase competitive advantage”. Just like the monetary informality, it is framed as separate from the real, formal employment relations with scholars arguing for either its strategic utility or the dangers of worker exploitation.

This is not how informality is experienced in countries in the Global East. There familial relations, community solidarity, and reputational loss play as strong of a role in employment relations, as contractual obligations. Moreover, formal and informal aspects are enmeshed with each other to produce wholly unique employment relations. Studies, utilising contextually strong methods like ethnography show the importance of culture, the role of trust and nepotism in hiring decisions and how payments are often secondary in explaining informality in the workplace. And these features remain stable, even after thirty-five years of reforms aiming at replicating Western European systems of markets and employment relations.

Despite this, efforts to explain the prevalence of informality in terms of systems often comes with the side-effects of presenting eastern countries as in a perpetual state of transition to western-style capitalism. The legacy of socialism and underdeveloped market institutions are often the explanations given for the state of employment relations in the East. And while this has undoubtedly produced lots of insightful studies on topics like international integration, corruption, and transition from one system of economic coordination to another, they fail to capture eastern-style employment relations in their entirety. At the same time, the literature on informality has repeatedly called for a more integrated approach in studying this phenomenon.

This paper aims to answer these calls by re-examining informality as a culturally and functionally embedded way-of-doing-things, using studies on Bulgaria as an example. It leans away from the monetary and taxation focused explanations and argues for the abandonment of the “transition” rhetoric in favour of embracing ambiguous employment relations as a research subject in their own right. It suggests a practical way forward via the process of contextualisation in order to bring the wider cultural and institutional effects into view. Further suggestions with the same aim include adopting the extended case method, developed by Burawoy. This will hopefully answer the calls for a more integrated approach when

discussing informality by examining it where it has a long history as an organising mechanism – the countries from the Global East.

G-I: Theorising the Social Boundaries of Work: Structures, Institutions, Practices and Meanings in the World of Work

21 October 2026 | 15.15–17.00 | Room C-101

Chair: Agata Krasowska (University of Wrocław)

Michelle Mielly (EMLyon Business School):

Bureaucratic Violence and the Constrained Entrepreneur: Ethnographic Evidence from Nicaragua

This paper examines how states deploy bureaucratic violence as a systematic instrument of control over workers, entrepreneurs, and small business owners operating in hostile institutional environments. We argue that bureaucracy, far from being a neutral administrative apparatus, constitutes one of the primary means through which states enforce the social boundaries of work; determining who may legitimately produce, accumulate, and organize economic life, and on what terms. Drawing on David Graeber's theorization of structural violence and its relationship to administrative power and grounded in ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Nicaragua in 2023, we develop a typology of bureaucratic violence that extends critical management and critical labor scholarship into authoritarian contexts in the Global South.

Our analysis identifies three interrelated mechanisms through which bureaucratic violence operates. First, administrative attrition or the use of regulatory delays, licensing obstacles, unpredictable rule changes, and fiscal harassment to exhaust and discipline private actors perceived as threatening to state interests or ideologically suspect. Second, legitimation through stigmatization, a discursive process by which entrepreneurs are framed as thieves, corrupt accumulators, or enemies of the public good, providing the state with moral cover for coercive intervention and normalizing its disciplinary role over economic actors. Third, dispossession as spectacle or the nationalization or seizure of firms as a public demonstration of sovereign power, producing chilling effects that extend well beyond targeted actors to reshape the entire field of entrepreneurial possibility.

We argue that these mechanisms do not constitute exceptional or episodic events but are pervasive features of economic life under authoritarian governance — mundane, unpredictable, and deeply structural. Consistent with critical perspectives on power and labor (Fleming & Spicer, 2007; Clegg, Courpasson & Phillips, 2006; Alvesson & Willmott, 1992), bureaucratic violence disciplines economic actors, forecloses strategic options, and forces entrepreneurs into constrained modes of agency oriented toward survival and exposure minimization rather than growth. The paper contributes to theorizations of the social boundaries of work by foregrounding the state not merely as a source of institutional uncertainty, but as an active and often violent arbiter of who works, who accumulates, and who is made to disappear from economic life.

References

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Miłosz Miszczyński, Aneta Pieczka (Kozminski University):

Competing Values of Labour: Infrastructures of waged work in warehousing industry in Poland

This paper examines the competing values of labour embedded in the infrastructures of waged work in Poland's warehousing industry. We focus on to the processes that have reshaped labour over the past decades: the erosion of living-wage employment, the uneven growth of part-time work and the proliferation of agency-mediated hiring. These transformations have generated a polarized spectrum of precarity in which employment security, income stability, and welfare protections are increasingly fragmented. At the same time, the composition of the available workforce is shifting, with historically subordinated (or unavailable!) groups incorporated on unequal terms and differential access to protections.

The paper proposes an infrastructural account that reveals how competing notions of value, carried within the infrastructural flows collide with each other. We approach warehousing not simply as a site of employment, but as a dense assemblage of actors, devices, regulatory arrangements, and social practices that together enable and govern flows of labour power. We argue that tensions around labour valuation – essentially what labour is “worth,” how it is measured and priced – are not reducible to wage levels or contractual forms. Instead, they are produced through infrastructures that span workplaces, labour supply chains, and social reproduction. This infrastructure includes not only employers and workers but also staffing agencies, transport and housing arrangements, digital systems of measurement, and welfare institutions, each shaping how labour is rendered available, comparable, and governable. As an outcome we show how collisions of valuation materialize within flows, producing both new vulnerabilities and new terrains of contestation.

G-II: Work and Professional Identities

21 October 2026 | 15.15–17.00 | Room C-140
Chair: Ewelina Ciaputa (Jagiellonian University in Krakow)

Robert Rogowski (University of Applied Sciences in Nowy Sącz):

"I'm Always at Work": Entrepreneurs' Accounts of Working Time and Work–Life Boundary Work

Entrepreneurship is frequently portrayed as a “24/7” endeavour, marked by long hours, blurred boundaries, and permanent availability. Yet we still know relatively little about how entrepreneurs themselves talk about working time and work–life boundaries in public accounts: how they describe temporal routines, how they justify boundary blurring, where they place (or refuse) limits, and how they narrate the moral and relational implications of being “always on.”

The proposed study examines publicly available long-form video interviews with self-identified entrepreneurs published online. It asks: (1) How do entrepreneurs describe the organization of their working time (hours, rhythms, intensity, and availability)? (2) How do they construct and negotiate work–life boundaries in their accounts (separation, integration, oscillation, oscillation between modes, or boundary absence)? (3) What justificatory repertoires and moral framings are mobilized to legitimize long hours and boundary blurring (e.g., passion/calling, responsibility, sacrifice, freedom, self-realization)? (4) How are the perceived consequences for well-being, close relationships, and entrepreneurial identity narrated, and what boundary practices or coping strategies are described?

Methodologically, the project will use reflexive thematic analysis. Interviews will be purposively selected to capture variation in entrepreneurial contexts and stages as presented in the narratives (e.g., early growth, stabilization, and moments of crisis or rapid change). The analytic procedure will involve iterative cycles of familiarization, coding, and theme development through constant comparison across cases. Coding will focus on three interconnected domains: (a) temporal practices (e.g., extended workdays, weekend work, fragmented time), (b) boundary practices (e.g., time-based rules, spatial arrangements, relational negotiations with partners/family/employees/clients, and technology-mediated availability), and (c) meaning-making and legitimation.

By mapping how entrepreneurs publicly narrate and normalize (or contest) “always-on” working time, the study aims to contribute to debates on the social boundaries of work beyond standard employment settings. It will also offer an empirically grounded vocabulary for understanding entrepreneurial boundary-making as a practical and moral accomplishment shaped by contemporary expectations of flexibility and availability.

Karolina Sikora (Jagiellonian University in Krakow):

Work-Life Balance Initiatives in Gender Equality Plans at Polish Universities and in Polish Research Institutes

In light of the growing awareness of the challenges associated with reconciling professional and private roles in academia, Polish universities are undertaking various initiatives aimed at supporting the well-being of staff and students. This trend coincided with the European Commission's 2021 requirement for institutions seeking funding from the prestigious Horizon Europe program to introduce and implement a Gender Equality Plan (GEP). One of the key thematic areas recommended by the Commission for inclusion in a GEP is work-life balance. Polish universities and research institutes, striving to meet the eligibility criterion for funding, are preparing and implementing these plans, which often represent the first systemic attempt to address issues such as caregiving burdens, employment flexibility, and support for parents and caregivers within the organization.

The objective of this presentation is to present the results of an analysis of Gender Equality Plans implemented at Polish universities, with a particular focus on actions supporting and promoting work-life balance (WLB). A qualitative study of 38 documents allowed for the identification of dominant strategies supporting the reconciliation of research and teaching duties with personal life. The presented analysis provides a cross-sectional overview of the measures designed and implemented by Polish universities and Polish research institutes - ranging from structural facilities (e.g., flexible working arrangements, childcare infrastructure) to the development of a supportive culture and awareness-building, as well as mechanisms for monitoring employee workloads. The findings evaluate the extent to which Polish higher education institutions are transitioning from declarative support to tangible structural changes that foster a sustainable academic career path.

G-II: Work and Professional Identities

21 October 2026 | 15.15–17.00 | Room C-140

Chair: Ewelina Ciaputa (Jagiellonian University in Krakow)

Kaja Zapędowska-Kling, Krystyna Dzwonkowska-Godula, Aleksandra Różalska, Marta Kucharska-Hauk (University of Lodz):

Navigating Work–Life Boundaries in Academia: Insights from the University of Lodz Work–Life Balance Team

Work-life balance has recently gained prominence as a crucial area in academic research, reflecting broader concerns about HR practices, well-being, organisational culture and sustainability of academic careers. In higher education institutions, the blurring boundaries between work and private life have intensified interest in understanding how academics navigate these challenges.

The presentation is based on a case study of the Work-Life Balance Team at the University of Łódź, established as a grassroots initiative by employees experiencing difficulties in reconciling their academic responsibilities with their private lives. The Team’s goals include diagnosing the needs of individuals in diverse caregiving roles, consulting on institutional solutions, and promoting knowledge as well as good practices related to work-life balance, as well as initiating informal support groups for employees facing similar challenges in balancing family and professional roles. Despite its relatively short period of activity, the Team has already generated valuable insights into the challenges faced by different categories of employees, adopting an intersectional perspective, as well as the barriers encountered by implementing WLB solutions in academia.

The presentation further highlights selected practices introduced at the University of Łódź, including the Guide to Good Practices in Business Communication, which supports the development of a culture grounded in “the right to be offline” / “the right to disconnect”. In addition, it outlines an interdisciplinary research project addressing multiple dimensions of WLB in academia. The project aims to investigate strategies and challenges associated with balancing professional and family life across diverse employee groups, examine their working conditions and expectations, and analyse institutional measures alongside discursive and linguistic practices.

Joanna Sztobryn-Giercuskiewicz (University of Lodz):

Psychological Safety in Higher Education Institutions in Poland – Pilot Study

This paper conceptualizes psychological safety in Polish higher education institutions (HEIs) as a problem of the social boundaries of academic work, rather than individual well-being. Building on the concept introduced by Amy Edmondson and drawing on sociological theories of power, hierarchy, and epistemic authority, psychological safety is understood here as a condition regulating who can speak, question, disclose difficulties, or challenge superiors without risking symbolic or material sanctions.

Polish universities constitute a particularly revealing case: they combine strong formal hierarchies, dependence on evaluative superiors (e.g., supervisors, grant leaders), precarious employment among early-career scholars, and competitive audit regimes. In such contexts, the boundary between legitimate professional voice and “improper” dissent is socially produced and unevenly distributed.

The paper presents findings from a pilot study, conducted across selected Polish HEIs. The study employed an adapted Academic Psychological Safety Scale (APSS) supplemented with qualitative narratives on strategic silence and disclosure.

Preliminary results indicate:

- (1) significantly lower psychological safety among doctoral candidates and fixed-term staff compared to senior academics;
- (2) a stronger impact of informal sanctions (e.g., reputational damage, exclusion from networks or projects) than formal procedures on communicative restraint;
- (3) a mediating role of epistemic marginalization: respondents who experienced their competence being questioned reported markedly reduced willingness to voice concerns.

Notably, the presence of formal policies (e.g., ethics codes, anti-mobbing regulations) showed limited association with perceived psychological safety. Instead, hierarchical dependence and normalized self-censorship emerged as central predictors.

By framing psychological safety as a boundary mechanism shaping access to voice, this study contributes to broader debates on work, stratification, and professional autonomy, demonstrating that in Polish HEIs the capacity to speak without fear remains structurally stratified.

G-II: Work and Professional Identities

21 October 2026 | 15.15–17.00 | Room C-140

Chair: Ewelina Ciaputa (Jagiellonian University in Krakow)

Sylwia Męcfal (University of Lodz); **Beata Bielska** (Nicolaus Copernicus University);
Adrianna Surmiak (University of Warsaw):

Collective support strategies for researchers - based on cases of research projects conducted in the context of social crises

In contemporary academia, institutional support structures often remain non-existent or insufficient, while bureaucratic demands and performance expectations continue to intensify. In such contexts, research conducted during social crises places additional methodological, ethical, and emotional burdens on scholars, frequently extending their availability beyond formally recognized working time.

In the CRISIS RE-THICS research project, we examine how qualitative social researchers adapt their methodological and ethical approaches when conducting research in the context of various types of social crises (i.e., natural, anthropogenic, and political crises). These adaptations often emerge in response to the lack of institutionalized forms of support and to the limited recognition of the relational labour involved in crisis-related fieldwork. As a result, some researchers develop collective and often informal support strategies to cope with intensified demands.

In this paper, we present selected cases of support strategies developed within research projects conducted during different social crises. Drawing on these cases, we reflect on what kinds of institutional and informal arrangements—such as supervision and intervision—may effectively support researchers’ well-being and contribute to more sustainable working conditions in academia. Although such forms of support appear increasingly necessary, they are not yet a standard practice, except for a supervisor - PhD student relation,, at least within the context of Polish academia.

G-III: The Fragmented Boundary: Solo Self-Employment and the Governance of Employment Status

21 October 2026 | 15.15–17.00 | Room T-301
Chair: Lisa Waldenburger (University of Innsbruck)

Stefan Bieńkowski (Polish Academy of Sciences):

Heterogeneity and Persistence: The Scale and Structure of Non-standard Forms of Employment in Poland

Despite interpretations of non-standard employment (NSE) as a stepping stone in occupational trajectories or as a desirable form of flexibility, empirical evidence indicates that it constitutes a less advantageous form of employment compared to standard contracts (see Kiersztyn 2021). The negative characteristics of NSE are embedded both in levels of institutional protection and in workers’ lived experiences of precarity and instability (see Mrozowski, Czarzasty 2020; Giermanowska 2017). This paper uses quantitative data to describe the structure, scale, and changes in non-standard employment in Poland over the last two decades. It investigates whether the broad category of non-standard employment captures a coherent segment of the labour market or rather encompasses structurally distinct forms of employment that differ in terms of socio-demographic characteristics..

The analysis begins with an examination of the protections associated with each form of employment in order to differentiate forms commonly labelled as non-standard in Poland, including: temporary employment, mandate contracts, specific-task contracts, and self-employment. It reviews typologies of employee and non-employee work arrangements and, on this basis, classifies non-standard employment as heterogeneous, describing variations in the scope and level of available protection. In the next step, drawing on quantitative data from Statistics Poland (GUS), Eurostat, and administrative register data from the Social Insurance Institution (ZUS), the paper traces changes in the scale and structure of NSE. It documents fluctuations in temporary employment, the gradual increase in mandate contracts, and the growth of self-employment. It analyses motives for selection of such employment, sectoral differentiation (PKD categories) and age cohorts.

The findings confirm that non-standard employment constitutes an institutionalised and permanent component of the Polish labour market. At the same time, it remains internally differentiated across distinct contractual forms. Sectoral analysis indicates a concentration in selected sectors, which points to processes of segmentation, however, NSE is present throughout the labour market as a whole. The age structure shows that NSE is distributed across the entire working population rather than confined to specific cohorts, which contradicts the interpretation of non-standard employment as a stepping stone. It points not only to precarisation of employment, but to a growing risk of future “paltry pensions” among workers under NSE (see Petelczyc 2025). These results are discussed in relation to broader transformations of the institutional context and workers’ perspectives.

Siënna Hernandez (University of Amsterdam):

Precarity or Autonomy? Solo Self-Employment and Emerging Labour Market Boundaries in the Netherlands

This paper examines recent regulatory efforts to limit solo self-employment in the Dutch care sector as a key site for understanding the redefinition of labour market boundaries. Solo self-employment (zzp) has expanded rapidly in Dutch healthcare over the past decade, driven by labour shortages, organisational restructuring, and growing demand for flexible staffing arrangements. While solo self-employment is often associated with autonomy and flexibility for workers, recent policy developments increasingly frame this growth as a structural problem for labour market regulation and the sustainability of the welfare state.

Since 2025, the Dutch government has intensified enforcement against “false self-employment,” requiring care workers who operate under conditions resembling employment to be hired as employees instead. Organisations that misclassify workers risk fines and tax corrections, and many care providers have begun reducing their reliance on freelancers. These measures are justified primarily in terms of worker protection, fair competition, and the preservation of collective social security arrangements.

At the same time, the tightening of regulatory boundaries also functions as a mechanism to control labour flexibility and reassert the standard employment relationship in a sector facing persistent labour shortages. Emerging restrictions on freelance work raise questions about the extent to which regulation protects workers from precarity or instead limits autonomy and alternative forms of labour market participation.

Based on an analysis of recent policy reforms, government documents, and sectoral debates, this paper explores how solo self-employment in the Dutch care sector is increasingly constructed as a regulatory problem. It argues that current reforms reflect broader tensions between flexibility and protection in contemporary welfare states and illustrate ongoing struggles over the governance of employment boundaries.

G-III: The Fragmented Boundary: Solo Self-Employment and the Governance of Employment Status

21 October 2026 | 15.15–17.00 | Room T-301

Chair: Lisa Waldenburger (University of Innsbruck)

Charline Bohm (University of Innsbruck):

Solo Self-Employment in Live-in Care: Conceptual Reflections on the Role of Family Members in Austria and Germany

The proliferation of solo self-employment (SSE) across Europe has intensified debates about the fragmentation of employment boundaries and the governance of labour relations. While these debates often focus on companies, platforms, and regulatory frameworks, less attention has been paid to private households as sites where employment status is actively produced and enacted. This paper asks: How do family members' decisions about employment models structure the governance of solo self-employment in transnational live-in care?

Focusing on live-in care in Austria and Germany, the paper develops a relational framework to analyse how employment status regimes shape everyday care arrangements. In Austria, live-in caregivers predominantly operate as formally self-employed workers. In Germany, by contrast, most caregivers are posted employees embedded in multi-layered transnational agency chains. These institutional configurations not only define legal classifications but also require family members to decide how care is organized, contracted, and governed.

The paper proposes that employment status regimes fundamentally structure negotiation processes within the household. Family members are not peripheral actors but central decision-makers in the construction of live-in care arrangements. By choosing between available regulatory models, they participate in allocating risks, defining responsibilities, and shaping authority structures. In doing so, they pre-structure negotiation spaces and influence the relational dynamics among all actors involved.

Bringing family members into debates on solo self-employment shifts attention to a less examined boundary conflict: the ambiguous authority of households in employment relations. Although family members formally lack employer status and corresponding legal rights of instruction, they are compelled to coordinate, direct, and supervise care work to ensure adequate support for their relatives. They must familiarize themselves with legal and institutional requirements and translate them into everyday practice. How they interpret and implement these frameworks directly affects the caregiver's working conditions. This tension between formal non-employer status and practical governance responsibilities constitutes a central yet understudied dimension of employment boundary fragmentation.

Rather than conceptualizing families simply as quasi-employers, care managers, or “just family,” the paper advances a relational perspective that highlights how authority, responsibility, and accountability are redistributed across actors in transnational live-in care. Private households thus emerge as sites where employment status is enacted, negotiated, and stretched beyond its legal definition, revealing how governance functions can be informally transferred to actors who are neither legally recognized as employers nor institutionally equipped for that role.

Empirically, the contribution builds on an ongoing qualitative doctoral project based on interviews with family members in Austria and Germany. Rather than presenting finalized

findings, it outlines an analytical framework and formulates theoretically grounded expectations regarding how employment status decisions may co-produce labour relations, authority structures, and vulnerability within transnational live-in care.

Fabian Beckmann (University of Duisburg-Essen); **Fabian Hoose** (Ruhr University Bochum); **Sophie Rosenbohm** (University of Duisburg-Essen):

The blind spot of platform work: Blurred boundaries in social media content creation and regulatory gaps

Recent debates on platform work and solo self-employment (SSE), as well as prior attempts of regulation have largely focused on digitally mediated labour on task-based digital labour platforms (DLPs) in sectors like ride-hailing or delivery services. By contrast, the work of content creators on social media platforms remains a regulatory and analytical blind spot, even though the creator economy is a rapidly growing segment of the platform economy and shares many features inherent to platform work – e.g. a strong dependency on platforms and an intensive use of algorithms. This paper examines how content creation blurs boundaries between self-employment and platform-dependent work as well as between professional and private life. The analysis draws on qualitative interviews with content creators in Germany.

Content creators operate as formally self-employed, yet their work is deeply embedded in platform-controlled infrastructures. Our findings underline that creators depend on proprietary platform markets where access to audiences, algorithmic visibility and monetization modes are unilaterally defined by platform companies. In this context, the market dependency of self-employment is transformed into a specific form of platform dependency characterized by unilateral rule changes, non-transparent algorithms structuring content and visibility and opaque monetization criteria, thereby blurring the boundaries between entrepreneurial autonomy and platform-controlled work.

At the same time, creators develop different forms of agency to cope with these uncertainties, including platform and income diversification, data-driven content strategies, and intensive community-building. While these strategies aim to buffer platform-induced risks and stabilise various income sources, they also generate new dependencies and strain, for instance, through constant availability demands by audiences and the erosion of boundaries between work and private life.

Against this background, the paper argues that content creation exemplifies a broader transformation of SSE in digital capitalism. Yet this segment remains largely outside current platform work regulations, including the EU Platform Work Directive, leaving key issues of social protection and collective representation unresolved.

G-III: The Fragmented Boundary: Solo Self-Employment and the Governance of Employment Status

21 October 2026 | 15.15–17.00 | Room T-301

Chair: Lisa Waldenburger (University of Innsbruck)

Karol Muszyński (University of Warsaw):

Organising a fragmented landscape - the Polish video game union and non-standard forms of employment

The video game sector in Poland is heavily fissurised, with production spread across multiple outsourcing studios and freelancers. The contractual forms in the sector are extremely heterogenous. Only around 1/3 of workers in the sector are hired on standard employment contracts, with studios largely hiring workers on non-standard forms of employment - as self-employed or on so-called civil law contracts. However, the use of non-standard employment is not only a result of employers' attempts to increase flexibility and lower workers' bargaining power, but in many instances also stems from workers' preferences. This is because regulatory and tax frameworks make non-standard forms of employment financially beneficial for workers in some instances, as they allow to decrease income taxes and social security contributions. These employment structures have to be contextualised by project-based organisation of labour in the sector which makes workers employment stability low - even if they are hired as regular employees.

This paper aims to describe the recent emergence of Polish Game Dev Union created in 2023, which is the single largest union in Poland with a substantial presence of self-employed workers. The union was created after non-standard workers were granted unionisation rights in 2019. The empirical basis for the paper are interviews with unionists and community organisers conducted by the author.

The paper will describe how a union manages to represent and balance the interests of its members in employment relationship with the ones who are hired in non-standard forms of employment. The union is in a complex position for the reason described above - while a substantial part of non-standard forms of employment can be described as a form of abuse/circumvention, many workers see benefits of being irregular, particularly due to extreme instability in the sector.

As a result, the union chooses a middle-ground path of promoting employment status as a choice of worker instead of a compulsory norm. It also chooses to operate as an industry-norm creator and networking structure to increase employment opportunities in the context of project-based organisation of labour. The paper will consider the larger consequences of such an approach for the industrial relations structures and sectoral-level organising.

G-IV: The Experiences of Migrantized Workers in Changing Labour Markets

21 October 2026 | 15.15–17.00 | Room T-401

Chair: Katarzyna Rakowska (University of Warsaw)

Guglielmo Meardi (Scuola Normale Superiore); **Marco Betti, Marcello Pedaci** (University of Teramo):

Worker representation in segregated labour markets: how to bridge ethnic fragmentation?

The paper presents an analytical and theoretical reflection on the difficulties and challenges for labour representation in the face of the growing fragmentation of production chains, especially in labour-intensive sectors characterized by fierce cost competition, in terms of overlapping fissurization of employment conditions and ethnic segregation in particular of migrant labour. The combination of different employment and migration statuses massively increases the risks of exploitation, but also makes encompassing representation and collective bargaining more difficult. While much work has been done on how trade unions can overcome dualization (Doellgast et al 2018) and on how they can build solidarities with Migrants (Marino et al 2017), little attention has been paid to the worst situation, where the combination of the two problems results in differential, or even competing, representation of different ethnic groups. These phenomena can occur in contexts previously characterized by encompassing industrial relations, with the "crowding out" of traditional unions and the emergence of new, competing actors such as grassroots unions, engaging in new repertoires of action. The paper analyses the different forms of action with reference to the literature on worker representation and union models (Offe and Wiesen­thal 1980, Hyman 2001, Meardi et al 2021...) and illustrations of critical cases in logistics and the garment industry. The conclusion presents propositions on the social, political and institutional factors that foster or reduce the fragmentation of representation.

Abstract 020

Jan Czarzasty, Horacy Dębowski, Ewa Gałęcka-Burdziak, Marta Pachocka, Olga Pankiv, Wojciech Stęchły (SGH Warsaw School of Economics):

Whatever will be will be. Reconstructing actual labour market policies towards migrants

Over recent several years Poland has gradually transformed from “sending” to “sending and receiving country” according to comparative migration studies in Europe. This has had profound effects on the domestic labour market, primarily (albeit not only) due to the fact, that incoming migration is in a substantial part driven by economic motives.

Integration of migrants into the labor market depends largely on: 1) the recognition of their competencies and qualifications acquired in their country of origin, and 2) enabling them to develop new competencies or update them, with language skills being the priority.

Economic theories point to a number of market failures that justify or even, in certain circumstances, necessitate state involvement. State involvement is essential in both of the two abovementioned areas. However, public policies encounter serious challenges in both, as its efficient design and execution requires coordination between various stakeholders, including not only government and public administration but also other collective actors such as employer organizations, education and training institutions (such as schools), and trade unions. Implementing efficient modes of coordination is difficult in environment of patchwork capitalism. On the other hand, institutional loopholes and discontinuities create spaces for social dynamism: in the absence of institutional state support, or in the event it is present but insufficient non-state actors often take the initiative and action.

Based on the empirical findings from the ongoing research project SKILLS4JUSTICE, we analyze if and how the state and public policies in Poland actually (non only rhetorically and formally) support migrant workers in the areas of skills recognition and acquisition of new skills, qualifications and competencies or updating/upgrading the ones in their possession, including language skills. Our original data comes from multi-method research, and is of both qualitative (IDIs with experts and migrants, total of 56) and quantitative (online survey, N=439). nature. Using the data we are exposing numerous and often substantial inefficiencies of public policies in the field of the labour market and life-long learning, and discuss the strategies developed and used by migrants and domestic actors in coping with not only state failures but also market failures, which inadequate public policy measures are unable to compensate for.

This contribution is a joint effort by the Polish SKILLS4JUSTIE team.

G-IV: The Experiences of Migrantized Workers in Changing Labour Markets

21 October 2026 | 15.15–17.00 | Room T-401

Chair: Katarzyna Rakowska (University of Warsaw)

Olga Wanicka (University of Warsaw):

'Help was the key': Negotiating mutual aid and commercial logics in OFWs migration to Poland beyond the state and linearity

Poland has become a dynamic 'migration hub' in Central Europe for Asian migrants, including Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs). OFWs' trajectories rarely lead directly from the Philippines. Instead, 'stepwise' migration from third countries (e.g., the UAE or Hong Kong) initiated by informal fixers and 'supporters' predominates, challenging linear and state-centric understandings of migration.

In the absence of formal bilateral agreements, these informal networks assume regulatory functions, turning 'help' into a key instrument for navigating precarious legal environments. This presentation demonstrates how an ethos of care is instrumentalized by various actors as an operational logic shaping OFWs' trajectories to Poland. Even formal intermediaries frame their involvement as 'helping' migrants. I analyze the consequences of this framing for the migration infrastructure and migrants themselves. The analysis focuses on how spatial modalities, ranging from material infrastructures such as dedicated airport terminals in Manila to digital spaces like YouTube and Facebook, as well as sport (e.g., the Filipino Basketball League in Warsaw) – condition mobility and regulation. These spaces constitute crucial arenas in which migrants interact with 'helpers' (fixers, supporters), where mutual aid is entangled with commercial logics and profit-making strategies.

These infrastructures produce a temporality of migration, often leading to 'infrastructural involution' (Xiang & Lindquist 2014) where the intensification of procedures results in stagnation and bureaucratic loops of red tape. The findings suggest that while contemporary migration infrastructure for OFWs enables mobility, it frequently disempowers migrants by rendering them dependent on informal logics of protection masked by an ethos of 'help'.

Mateusz Karolak (University of Wrocław):

Mapping Migrants' Labour-Market Position in Poland through the Power Resources Approach

Over the last decade, Poland has undergone a major migration transition, becoming a country of net immigration. As foreign have become an increasingly important part of the labour force, many of them have also continued to face a range of well-known labour-market disadvantages, including occupational segmentation, non-recognition of qualifications, deskilling, and various forms of discrimination, often shaped by intersecting inequalities such as gender, class, race, or legal status. At the same time, migrant workers in Poland remain only weakly unionized, and in the face of workplace problems they appear more likely to rely on individual rather than collective strategies, such as normalization, temporariness, adaptation, or exit.

This presentation offers a preliminary attempt to map the situation of migrantized workers in Poland through the lens of the Power Resources Approach (PRA). Rather than focusing solely on rights or legal protections, it draws attention to the configuration of resources that workers can mobilize in their relations with employers and the state. The paper discusses migrants' position in terms of structural power, institutional power, organizational power, and societal power, including its discursive dimension. I argue that the relative weakness of migrant workers in Poland should be explained by uneven and often fragile configuration of these resources.

Empirically, the presentation draws on a broader research project combining qualitative and quantitative materials, including biographical narrative interviews with migrant workers, pilot interviews with industrial-relations stakeholders, and a large corpus of Polish-language press coverage on migrant labour. While the presentation is primarily conceptual and exploratory, it also serves as a point of departure for further research arguing that PRA should be extended by incorporating biographical resources in order to better capture migrants' capacities to cope with and resist labour-market marginalization.

G-IV: The Experiences of Migrantized Workers in Changing Labour Markets

21 October 2026 | 15.15–17.00 | Room T-401

Chair: Katarzyna Rakowska (University of Warsaw)

Lisa YM LEUNG (Lingnan University): Liminal Solidarities:

Tactical Resistances of Migrant Gig Workers in Hong Kong

The burgeoning rise of platform economy complicates the intersectional politics surrounding migrant gig workers. On top of the online algorithmized labouring and exploitation, migrant gig workers are exposed to multiple layers of offline aggression and injustices, rendering them the ‘precariat’ woven into the platformized digital infrastructure, notably in platform delivery work such as couriers, Uber drivers and food delivery. The arrival of Keeta (subsidiary of Meituan) in Hong Kong in March 2023 aggravates the employer/ employee power asymmetry on food delivery platforms, as the monopolizing platform employs algorithmized tactics that both trap workers into competing for worse exploitation. On the other hand, disgruntled minority/ migrant gig workers are capable of developing creative tactics to leverage or even subvert platform aggression, or engage in varying forms of organized resistances, in the face of encroaching state surveillance and mercenary exploitation.

This paper crystallizes the findings of several years of research that investigates historical and structural reasons for the struggles of south Asian migrant / minority platform workers in Hong Kong, as well as their tactical agencies and solidarity, with an aim to reclaim ‘racial labour subjectivity. Adopting qualitative methods such as interviews with migrant food delivery workers, ethnographic observation of worker action, this chapter addresses the following questions: i) How has Keeta’s algorithmic management presented new layers and forms of exploitation against migrant gig workers? ii) How would migrant gig workers engage in varying forms of affective responses and resistances, from individualized to organized actions, against online and offline aggression? iii) What are the varying resources/ capital that migrant workers possess, or ‘affordances’, both online and offline, in the face of aggravated platform and state surveillance? Employing the notion of ‘liminality’, the chapter discusses how migrant gig workers’ tactical resiliences and resistances would challenge our thinking about migrant (gig) worker subjectivity, agencies and solidarity. The chapter will enrich discussions around the book project’s key theme of everyday agency, grassroots solidarities, and situated forms of resilience. It hopes to contribute to scholarship on the subversive futures or migrant gig workers against increasingly authoritarian platform and state governance.

G-V: Work and Professional Identities: Between Organisations, Professions and Social Change

22 October 2026 | 11.30–13.15 | Room C-101

Chair: Dominika Byczkowska-Owczarek (University of Lodz)

Sławomir Banaszak (Adam Mickiewicz University Poznań):

Managers' identity. Between organisation and social structure

This paper examines the identity of contemporary managers. The author discusses both organisational roles and the social roles of managers. Managers are treated here according to the economic and sociological theories of ownership. On this basis, the author discusses managerial classes, analysing them especially in the context of classes of capital owners.

The subject of consideration is also managerial education, an important factor in the author's concept of social differentiation. The author refers to classic concepts in economic sociology and to modern concepts that explain the place and role of managers in modern societies and economies.

Therefore, the considerations involve the classical concept of the division of labour (Smith, Comte, Durkheim) and adapt it to the analysis of modern social phenomena and processes. This is similar to the association of managers in various industry organisations, which actively contribute to changing the economic and social reality.

The author's these are illustrated by empirical research on Polish managers, which the author has conducted since 2010, combining quantitative analyses with qualitative research, particularly in-depth interviews with CEOs operating in Poland.

The author concludes with a methodological reflection on future research on managers, both in organisations and in social structures. He also notes the possibility of using the term "social personality" instead of "identity."

Ece Bengi Sağlamer Tüfekçioğlu (Istanbul Medeniyet University):

Trust, Delegation of Authority, and Performance Tension: The Definition of Managerial Work in Türkiye

This study is based on 37 in-depth interviews conducted with senior executives working in large-scale companies in Türkiye. The research examines how corporate elites define managerial roles and how this definition reshapes the boundaries of “work.” While labour literature predominantly focuses on forms of insecurity in lower segments, the relational forms through which work is constituted in the upper layers of the labour market have been addressed more limitedly.

The interviews show that executives define their work not in terms of direct execution but through the delegation of decision-making authority, the selection of personnel, and the monitoring of outcomes. In this context, “trust” gains a central position both as a precondition for the delegation of authority and as a basis of organizational legitimacy. However, delegation of authority does not imply the disappearance of control; rather, it operates alongside continuous performance monitoring and pressure to produce results.

The findings demonstrate that senior managerial positions do not constitute zones of absolute security; instead, they may become fragile due to short-term financial targets, changes in ownership structures, and restructuring processes. This situation reveals that even at the top segment of the labour market, stability is conditional and managerial positions are continuously reproduced within a performance-based regime of legitimacy.

The study argues that managerial labour becomes abstracted from production and is redefined through decision-making, oversight, and representational practices; yet this abstraction is structured through a tension between trust-based authority relations and performance pressure. Accordingly, it suggests that the social boundaries of work should be reconsidered not only through insecurity in lower segments but also through the fragility and performance tensions experienced in senior managerial positions.

G-V: Work and Professional Identities: Between Organisations, Professions and Social Change

22 October 2026 | 11.30–13.15 | Room C-101

Chair: Dominika Byczkowska-Owczarek (University of Lodz)

Iwona Wilkowska (University of Westminster):

Learning to Be “Realistic”: Managerialist Signals, Unitarist HRM Education and Pre-Professional Identity Formation in the UK Business Schools

Business schools play a central role within the academic field in shaping how future professionals understand organisations, work, and their own responsibilities within them. Professional education does not merely transmit technical knowledge but also socialises students into particular understandings of what constitutes legitimate professional behaviour, credible expertise, and realistic forms of organisational influence. In Human Resource Management (HRM), this process is particularly consequential because the profession is positioned between organisational performance imperatives, employee advocacy, and growing expectations related to ethics, sustainability, and responsible management. This paper examines how HRM master’s students interpret these expectations during their studies and how HRM education contributes to shaping the boundaries of what forms of professional agency appear realistic and professionally legitimate.

The paper engages with research on the academic field and the role of universities as sites where the meanings and norms of professional work are produced. Within HRM education, teaching has been shaped by managerialist and unitarist assumptions about organisations. Managerialism encourages students to interpret organisational issues primarily through the lens of performance and managerial authority, while unitarism presents organisations as communities of shared interests in which conflicts between employers and employees are treated as misunderstandings rather than structural tensions. Although contemporary HRM programmes increasingly incorporate themes such as sustainability, this is often introduced within a broader pedagogical framework that continues to privilege organisational alignment and managerial legitimacy.

Empirically, the paper draws on narrative interviews with HRM master’s students enrolled in a UK business school. Interviews invited participants to reflect on how their understanding of HRM evolved during their studies and to identify moments when teaching changed how they imagined the profession. Particular attention was given to how students encountered signals about what constitutes a “credible” HR professional.

The analysis focuses on how students narrate turning points in their educational experience and how they interpret signals about professional legitimacy. Findings suggest that HRM education communicates implicit expectations about what responsible and credible HR practice looks like in organisational contexts. Participants frequently described moments when HR became more “real” through exposure to practitioner examples or discussions of organisational constraints. These encounters often emphasised the need for HR professionals to align initiatives with organisational priorities, justify actions through business arguments, and navigate hierarchical decision-making structures.

Across interviews, these experiences contributed to the construction of professional identities oriented toward organisational realism and managerial legitimacy. Students described

learning that successful HR professionals must demonstrate loyalty to organisational goals and frame initiatives in ways that align with business priorities. Even when participants expressed commitments to ethical or sustainability concerns, these aspirations were frequently reframed in ways that prioritised organisational feasibility and managerial acceptance.

The paper contributes to research on work in the academic field by showing how business school education participates in shaping the meanings and expectations attached to professional roles before graduates enter organisational practice. By examining how students interpret pedagogical signals about credibility and realism, the study highlights how managerialist and unitarist assumptions embedded in HRM education influence the kinds of professional identities future HR practitioners learn to inhabit.

Antonina Michalska-Sabal (AGH University of Krakow):

Who is and who is not a professional musician? Framing of union identity. Case of Musicians' Union of the Republic of Poland (ZZM RP)

A union's identity is formed through the interpretive "framing" of problems (Snow & Benford 2000). Interpretive frames build a sense of community and justify action. Identity is a process, associated with a specific narrative, emerging through the negotiation of meanings (Melucci 1996). A set of beliefs and norms emerges that define the union's purpose, ideology, and strategies (Hodder & Edwards 2015).

In the case of Polish musicians, a strong individual professional identity ("I am an artist"), constituted by a passion for their profession and a shared experience of precarity (reinforced by the crisis that has hit the industry as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic), has led to a strengthened sense of shared fate and has evolved into concrete actions in the public sphere, along with criticism of the government.

The Polish Musicians' Union is a relatively young organization – it has existed for a decade (since 2016), and therefore serves as an interesting example of the emergence of a group identity. One of the union's most important goals in recent years has been to ensure that musicians are covered by the social welfare system in a manner appropriate to their specific profession. The work on the Act on Social Security for Professional Artists is an interesting example of collective action and the alignment of common interests, as well as a step in the process of developing a collective identity.

In the presentation, I want to examine the process of developing musicians identity and negotiating meanings, based on my own research among professional musicians, including union activists (individual in-depth interviews) and analysis of online discussions.

G-V: Work and Professional Identities: Between Organisations, Professions and Social Change

22 October 2026 | 11.30–13.15 | Room C-101

Chair: Dominika Byczkowska-Owczarek (University of Lodz)

Mina K. Kostova, Vassil Kirov (Bulgarian Academy of Sciences); **Zuzanna Kowalik, Aleksandra Prusak** (Institute for Structural Research):

Divergent Responses, Convergent Outcomes: Quality of Work, Professional Identity and the Nursing Shortage in Post-Socialist Healthcare Systems

Labour and skills shortages have become a serious challenge across Europe. Central and Eastern European countries (CEEC) have only experienced acute pressure in recent years (Astrov et al., 2021). Within the EU, including CEEC, nursing has repeatedly been identified as one of the professions with the most critical staffing shortages (ELA, 2023). Bulgaria and Poland are particularly striking cases in this respect. Both countries have a post-socialist history and have undergone significant structural changes over the last few decades. They have also experienced decades of labour emigration, resulting in an ageing nursing workforce. Yet they have pursued very different institutional responses to the same type of crisis. Poland has taken action through trade unions and wage reform, whereas Bulgaria has relied on staff resilience and small-scale local level initiatives. However, the shortage-related crisis still persists. This paper argues that the shortage of nurses in both countries is related to the problematic quality of work and transcend national policy variation, wage demands, and collective action.

This study draws on in-depth, 28 semi-structured interviews conducted in both countries as part of the European comparative SkilMeeT project (Skills for labour markets in the digital and green transition). On the basis of a commonly elaborated guidelines, a research tool was developed for the interviews in both countries and was used for the purpose to allow the obtained empirical data to be examined in a comparative context. The findings reveal a striking convergence: despite following differentiated institutional and policy paths, these paths do not significantly affect the job quality of nurses because other structural factors play a more important role and are more consistent across borders. This aligns with Kubisa (2016), who argues that job quality for Polish nurses encompasses not only wage, but also autonomy, the work environment, nurse-patient relationships and skill development — elements that, although considered meaningful, are still undermined by structural factors. Similarly to Holman (2013), the concept of quality of work has expanded over time to encompass more than just remuneration, including voice, career development, and work-life balance. This convergence is significant because it persists despite divergent national responses. For example, Poland has implemented substantial pay and educational reforms, and has a highly organised nursing workforce — the Trade Union of Nurses and Midwives (OZZPiP) alone includes 80,000 members — yet shortages are worsening. Meanwhile, Bulgaria remains largely stagnant institutionally, with minimal municipal efforts to expand nursing education.

These findings contribute to the growing sociological literature on the weaponisation of flexibility against care workers. They suggest that nurses across post-socialist Europe have become structurally trapped, with their professional dedication being exploited as a mechanism of control. However, this deters people from entering the profession rather than prompting reform.

G-VI: Working in the Academic Field: Between Structural Conditions and Individual Experiences

22 October 2026 | 11.30–13.15 | Room C-140

Chair: Olga Czeranowska (SWPS University)

Frerk Blome (TU Dortmund University):

Mechanisms of Upward Social Mobility. A qualitative analysis of class-specific careers in law and educational science

Higher education institutions are key to the (re)production and legitimation of social inequalities and have increasingly been studied at the level of students in this respect. However, little research has been devoted to academic careers in the context of class-specific inequalities. The few studies available suggest an underrepresentation of less privileged scholars and focus on explaining the reproduction of these inequalities. In contrast, this paper refers to theories of the social self, bringing into focus an interactionist perspective suitable for explaining social mobility. Drawing on a comparative analysis of 27 autobiographical narrative interviews with German law and education professors of different social origins, the article reveals two mechanisms of upward social mobility. First, through positive evaluations of student and academic performance—and the social comparison processes based on them—the confidence of socially mobile academics in their own abilities grows, and their self-concept changes. Second, social relationships and interactions with authoritative others also modify self-concepts. Both mechanisms are intertwined, in that performance indicators are closely linked to the formation of social relationships, positive evaluation, and encouragement by authoritative others. These findings contribute to scholarship on inequality research in higher education and social mobility research in general by providing comparative insights into class-specific academic careers and the mechanisms of social mobility within academia.

Abstract 035

Justyna Kajta (SWPS University); **Katarzyna Bielecka** (University of Warsaw):

The meaning of class background in the academic field: experiences of first-generation and continuing generation academics in Poland

The presentation aims to examine class-related experiences in the academic field. As the literature shows, an individual's class background influences not only their educational and professional choices, but also their position and relationships within professional fields (cf. Crew 2020; Haney 2015; Friedman and Laurison 2019; Keil 2025). By focusing on the narratives of first- and continuing-generation academics, the paper explores the significance of class background in academia, which is a prestigious space for cultural production (Bourdieu, 1984).

Recently, a growing body of literature has emerged dedicated to the experiences of first-generation students and academics. As existing studies demonstrate, universities can be challenging and unfamiliar environments for those from working-class backgrounds who have limited economic, cultural and social capital and often need to familiarise themselves with institutional rules independently (see Crew 2020; Jack 2016; Łuczaj 2023; Reay 2018). However, important gaps remain that require greater scholarly attention. Firstly, the Central and Eastern European region is underrepresented in these discussions. Secondly, while much of the literature focuses on access to higher education, considerably less attention has been paid to 'university stayers' — those who decide to apply for PhD programmes and pursue academic careers within their field. Thirdly, as most studies concentrate on the experiences of those achieving upward mobility, comparative perspectives that juxtapose the experiences of academics from different class backgrounds are lacking. This paper aims to contribute to all three of these areas, at least partially.

The findings are based on an analysis of 55 biographical-narrative interviews (Schütze 2012) conducted within the framework of two research projects: Crossing (in)visible boundaries: Experiencing upward mobility in individuals' biographies and RaM-CLASS. Class reproduction and mobility – biographical experiences in academic, artistic, and business fields. Drawing on an in-depth analysis of the collected life stories, this paper addresses the following research questions: Do the interviewees perceive class background as a significant factor in pursuing academic careers in Poland? Do they experience class-based inequalities within the academic field? What similarities and distinctions emerge when comparing the narratives of academics from different class backgrounds?

G-VI: Working in the Academic Field: Between Structural Conditions and Individual Experiences

22 October 2026 | 11.30–13.15 | Room C-140

Chair: Olga Czeranowska (SWPS University)

Julia Kubisa (University of Warsaw):

Fixing a „leaky pipeline” in academia - fixing people or fixing the system?

The „leaky pipeline” is a phenomenon recognized in academia of progressive loss of women and underrepresented minorities in the course of scientific careers due to structural barriers, bias and lack of support. It affects the representation of women in science and scientific leadership.

In the presentation, I aim to present and discuss the ongoing process that is taking part in one of the biggest universities in Poland. After diagnosing the phenomenon of career slowdowns of women between the PhD and habilitation that may result in resignations from academia, the university launched a mentoring & support program for women scientists to address the leaky pipeline issue. I conducted 30 extended interviews with the participants in the beginning of the project in order to map their position, scientific trajectory, perceived barriers, experiences of bias and plans and their attitudes towards the program, also their job security and level of precariousness. After the program finished, I conducted another round of 30 interviews to check the impact of the program and their current scientific trajectory.

My aim is to discuss, with use of intersectional perspective, the outcomes on individual and systemic/institutional level, asking if the program „fixes” the participants by providing them skills or does it fix the system, addressing the barriers and biases, and what should be done on systemic level to prevent the leaky pipeline. I will use a dual sociologist-researcher - practitioner/tempered radical perspective as I both research and introduce institutional change at the university.

Beata Pawłowska (University of Lodz):

Consent to Critique: The Meaning of Emotions in the Multidimensional Evaluation of an Academic Teacher's Work

Emotions play a huge role in the professional work of every employee. They shape interactions and cooperation. In the work of an academic teacher, they can build motivation to work and influence the perceived satisfaction and self-esteem (pride). They can also strongly influence on burnout and demotivation (shame, fear). Interactional situations in which an academic teacher finds themselves arouse certain emotions and create the need to manage them. The work of an academic teacher is constantly assessed, which influences the assessment of self. Strong rivalry and competitiveness make it necessary to develop mechanisms for managing emotions to express consent to criticism, work through failures and adjust the level of one's own ambitions to system requirements. The paper based on qualitative research embedded in the interpretative paradigm, conducted with academic teachers.

G-VI: Working in the Academic Field: Between Structural Conditions and Individual Experiences

22 October 2026 | 11.30–13.15 | Room C-140

Chair: Olga Czeranowska (SWPS University)

Kamil Łuczaj (University of Lodz):

Unified Habitus or Plural Dispositions? Career Trajectories and Trade-Offs in International Academic Mobility

Set within the new mobilities paradigm (Sheller and Urry 2006; Alloul 2021), this conference paper examines how cultural capital is transmitted in transnational spaces. It builds on narrative interviews with academics from different social class backgrounds – from working-class individuals to inheritors in the strict sense of the term (e.g., children of poets, artists, and university professors) – all engaged in transnational mobility. While numerous authors have challenged the assumption that academic mobility necessarily entails upward social mobility in academia (Leung 2016, Luczaj 2024), it remains analytically instructive to ask how social reproduction and international mobility intersect.

For this reason, the presentation is based on four extended case studies (Burawoy 1998), constructed from autobiographical narrative interviews with scholars. The first case presents a trajectory of direct social reproduction, illustrated by Bartek, who moved from Poland under socialist rule to Canada. This case serves as a baseline model for subsequent comparisons and aligns with literature on privileged university students (Bourdieu 1996; Bourdieu 2003) who mobilize family capital to benefit from mobility (Bahna 2021).

The second case study focuses on Maria, the daughter of a renowned artist and diplomat. Although she experienced declassing after moving to the United States, she evaluated this outcome positively, as mobility freed her from the overwhelming influence of her father on her life plans and self-perception. This thus represents a case of declassing that has been biographically reworked.

The third case, Tom, is a Scottish academic who moved from an academic center to peripheral Hungary. For him, migration enabled escape from a mal-orchestration of habitus (Bourdieu 2025) experienced in his home context. By contrast, Katalin followed a different trajectory: originating from Eastern Europe, where she felt unwelcome for both class and ethnic reasons, mobility—despite her lack of inherited capital—opened the door to an international career, which she later relinquished in order to return to her homeland.

The paper concludes that, while starting from an orthodox Bourdieusian understanding of the academic field, the empirical insights call for a more nuanced conception of academic dispositions of habitus as activated under varying social conditions (Lahire 2003). This perspective resonates with recent research across migration studies, higher education, and the sociology of work.

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G-VII: Labour Movements, The Far Right and the Retreat from Democracy – How Unions and Labour Movements Can Successfully Fight Back

22 October 2026 | 11.30–13.15 | Room T-301

Chair: Paul Stewart (KU Leuven)

Assaf Bondy (University of Bristol):

Strange Bedfellows: Union Dependency on Right-Wing Populist Parties

Trade unions built the institutions of democratic capitalism. For much of the twentieth century, they anchored social-democratic coalitions, defended collective bargaining, and served as organizational bulwarks against authoritarian politics. How, then, do we explain unions that accommodated - and in some cases actively enabled - the dismantling of the very democratic institutions they once helped construct?

This paper argues that the answer lies not in ideological conversion or rank-and-file preferences, but in a structural condition that accumulates quietly through successive rounds of pragmatic exchange. When dealignment from traditional party allies leaves unions without credible political alternatives, cooperation with a governing right-wing populist party becomes the path of least resistance. Each round of exchange appears rational - the benefits are concrete, immediate, and flow directly to members. Yet what begins as pragmatic adaptation accumulates, through successive accommodations, into structural entrapment: internal constituencies develop material stakes in the alliance's continuation, exit costs compound with every cycle, and the party's leverage quietly expands beyond the terms of any specific deal. No single decision crosses an irreversible threshold. Dependency is visible only in retrospect — in the cumulative sequence, not in any isolated choice.

Drawing on a Most Different Systems Design, the paper traces how repeating moments of political exchange between trade unions and right-wing populist parties in power accumulates into a political dependency across two cases that differ fundamentally in institutional history - Poland and Israel. In both, the dependent union proved unable to resist its partner's assault on democratic institutions, not because leadership was unwilling, but because the structural conditions the alliance had produced made resistance organizationally inconceivable.

The paper also attends to the political consequences of cooperation itself. Beyond the material exchanges that sustain the alliance, union compliance serves as a legitimation resource for the governing party, providing social cover for policies and institutional changes that might otherwise face broader resistance. A cooperative union does not merely tolerate democratic erosion, it normalizes it.

Miguel Martinez Lucio, Holly Smith, Stefania Marino (University of Manchester);
Heather Connolly (Grenoble School of Management):

Traditions, memories and cultural practices: migrant action and organisational changes within established unions

Increasingly, attention has been paid on the role of migrant-led organising, within and outside established unions, to underline the fundamental role of migrants in terms of collective action and labour struggles. This literature has highlighted the scarce considerations of migrants as central actors in traditional industrial relations research. At the same time, it has tended to depict new forms of ‘independent’ migrants’ action as being in tension with, or in opposition to, traditional union practices and wider institutional frameworks due to the latter’s perceived hostile or exclusionary approaches to migrant workers. While acknowledging these approaches and debates, this paper focuses on specific (historical) case studies of both extant and previous migrant activism within established unions in Spain and the United Kingdom - and how this varies compared to other contexts within Europe. These cases illustrate the diversity of spaces, internal to trade unions, populated by migrant workers which are used to develop transversal forms of solidarity, political exchanges, and innovative actions.

These cases underline how migrant workers have contributed to shape the way union cultural practices have evolved over time, and how migrants and broader immigrant and emigrant activism have engaged with union traditions, memory, and past struggles, making these crucial in the development and framing of strategies aimed at widening representation and inclusion. This paper shows how “innovative practices” by migrant workers are connected historically across a range of initiatives and strategies and how solidarity is constructed through such practices. Nevertheless, this historical framing also brings challenges and can constrain migrant self-organising and the union engagement with workers in an inclusive manner.

G-VII: Labour Movements, The Far Right and the Retreat from Democracy – How Unions and Labour Movements Can Successfully Fight Back

22 October 2026 | 11.30–13.15 | Room T-301

Chair: Paul Stewart (KU Leuven)

Mateusz Skoratko (University of Warsaw):

The Ecological Frontline: How Labour Unions Resist the Far Right Through Environmental Struggles

This paper investigates the potential of contemporary labour unions in Poland to confront the climate-ecological crisis while resisting the anti-ecological and authoritarian agendas advanced by far-right movements. In the context of rising ecological degradation and political polarization, labour unions are uniquely positioned as sites of collective agency capable of linking environmental justice with democratic and social emancipation, going beyond the dominant neoliberal way of understanding ecology.

Drawing on in-depth interviews with members of the anarcho-syndicalist “Workers’ Initiative” union, analysis of union communications and autoethnographic method as the author is an active member of the latter, the study examines how unions mobilize around ecological issues, from campaigns against workplace pollution to fights for sustainable labor practices, highlighting how environmental struggles are inseparable from labor rights and collective solidarity.

The theoretical framework is grounded in Karl Marx’s concept of labour as a metabolic exchange between humanity and nature, and John B. Foster’s notion of the ecological rift. Capitalist modes of production disrupt this metabolism, alienating workers from their labor and society from nature. The paper argues that neoliberal labor precarization and the commodification of nature have deepened both material and ecological alienation, creating fertile ground for far-right movements to exploit social insecurity, redirecting workers’ grievances toward nationalist and anti-ecological agendas.

The study shows that contemporary unions can act as counter-hegemonic actors, reclaiming ecological issues as central to labor struggles and democratic engagement. By framing environmental justice as a collective, class-based concern, unions can challenge both ecological degradation and the political forces that seek to undermine social solidarity, democracy, and sustainable labor practices. The paper concludes that the revitalization of unions as democratic, ecological actors is crucial for resisting the intertwined threats of both environmental crisis, and far-right authoritarianism.

Jan Czarzasty (SGH Warsaw School of Economics):

What crisis? Ambivalent stance of the government and labour quiescence in the face of unfolding inflation in Poland

The inflation crisis that hit Poland in 2021 was first such an event in thirty years, after the hyperinflation of 1990 was halted by the “shock therapy”. In other words, to the generation(s) of Poles born after the fall of authoritarian socialism it was a truly unprecedented situation, as well as one of many specific crises combining into a ‘polycrisis’. The real wages briefly fell down, in spite of the dynamic growth of nominal wages continuing. Looking back at the events of 2021-23, two major phenomena attract attention. First, ambivalent stance of the government, who did not see real wage (also pensions and social benefits) protection as a priority. Second, labour (and in a broader sense, social) quiescence, as no increase in social unrest prompted by the erosion of disposable incomes was registered. The contribution is empirically based on the data collected in course of the research done for the sake the MAINSOC project in Poland, reinforced with the findings of research done with the COV-WORK project, which are discussed within the theoretical framework emerging from the debates running in the field of comparative political economy on transformations of modern capitalism with particular emphasis on its variations in the Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), especially, the ‘patchwork capitalism’.

G-VII: Labour Movements, The Far Right and the Retreat from Democracy – How Unions and Labour Movements Can Successfully Fight Back

22 October 2026 | 11.30–13.15 | Room T-301

Chair: Paul Stewart (KU Leuven)

Kurt Vandaele (European Trade Union Institute):

Undermining workers' purchasing power and decommodification comes at a cost: conditions and mechanisms explaining Belgium's high strike activity (1991-2025)

Over the past twenty years or so, Belgium has appeared as one of Europe's most strike-prone countries. Simultaneously, some countries with a strike-prone past, such as Italy and Greece, officially no longer collect data on strikes, whereas Spain has deliberately excluded some large strikes. While Belgium's strike level might thus be relatively lower in the rankings if all data were available, this elevated strike activity appears to reflect more than a data artefact resulting from gaps in comparative data. This paper explores why this is the case and centres on the use of political mass strikes, which are an enduring part of the workers' action repertoire in Belgium. Political mass strikes can be defined as large strikes against (announced) policies of political authorities and either take the form of general strikes, national days of strike action or large strikes in the public sector against the state as an employer. Based on quarterly data on the number of days not worked due to industrial action per 1,000 employees, the central research question is what explains ebbs and flows in strike activity in both the private and state-governed sector in Belgium between 1991 and 2025. This article therefore analyses the necessary and sufficient conditions via a fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis (QCA). Methodologically, the paper contributes by combining set-theoretic analysis with applied critical realism in industrial relations research, as the QCA results are interpreted through abductive reasoning to trace generative mechanisms. Drawing on the literatures on strike activity and on government power in political science, as well as substantive knowledge about Belgium's political economy, the following key findings are expected. First, multiple pathways will lead to a high strike level in both sectors, putting forward various combinations of the following conditions: coalition governments dominated by right-wing political parties, budgetary pressures inducing austerity measures, governmental intervention in wage-setting and specific legislative initiatives such as those initiating pension reforms. Second, causal asymmetry is expected with regards to the conditions associated with non-high strike levels, including, for instance, the absence of pension reforms or budgetary pressures, which are both especially associated with caretaker government phases. The paper's theoretical contribution lies in integrating political and economic explanations. In doing so, it situates shop-floor dynamics within the interplay of the government's composition and agenda-setting power, budgetary pressures introducing austerity measures, restrictions on free collective bargaining and legislative initiatives, overall undermining workers' purchasing power and decommodification from market pressures.

G-VIII: Decent Migrant Care Work: Blurred Boundaries, Tensions and Alliances

22 October 2026 | 11.30–13.15 | Room T-401

Chair: Katarzyna Zajda (University of Lodz)

Ewa Palenga-Möllenbeck (University of Frankfurt); **Ivanna Kyliushyk** (Kozminski University); **Roxana Fiebig-Spindler** (Goethe University Frankfurt):

The Invisible Hand of Care: a Typology of Brokerage Actors in Migrant Care Labour

Providing senior care is one of the most pressing challenges in rapidly ageing Europe, particularly in the Central and Eastern European region, which remains largely a care-sending area. Poland has emerged as a trans-European hub for long-term care, acting as a sending, receiving, and transit country, driven by commercial and non-commercial migrant brokerage. Our research draws from ethnographic field work and 42 interviews conducted in Ukraine, Poland and Germany in 2024/2025. In our paper, we first present an empirical typology of brokerage actors in the care sector, categorising them according to two dimensions: formalisation (formal, semi-formal and informal) and commodification (for-profit and non-for-profit). This typology captures a broad range of actors, from informal migrant networks and individual brokers, through semi-formal actors such as self-organised caregiver groups and social media platforms, and to formalised institutions such as civil society organisations, public employment offices, and commercial agencies. Using this typology, we examine how and why increasing formalised informality occurs within the care economy, under what circumstances, and with what consequences for carers’ working conditions. Furthermore, our analysis highlights the significant role of non-commercial forms of care support within this commercialised sector. In the second stage, we will discuss the initial results of our transdisciplinary collaboration with relevant stakeholders, particularly transnationally active NGOs and trade unions. This engaged research, planned for spring 2026, will consist of workshops and the joint development of policy recommendations and toolkits for practitioners.

Abstract 045

Charline Bohm, Lisa Waldenburger, Bernhard Weicht (University of Innsbruck):

Beyond the Care Triad: Boundary Work and the Role of Intermediaries in Transnational Live-in Care

Across Europe, transnational live-in care has become a central pillar of elderly care, typically organized through private agencies operating across borders. While research has partly analyzed the care triad between caregiver, care recipient, and family, the role of intermediaries in shaping care relations and labour conditions remains underexplored. We suggest that agencies and other coordinating actors do more than arrange logistics: they influence how responsibilities, rights, and expectations are negotiated within households.

The paper draws on qualitative interview material from live-in care arrangements in Austria and Germany, including agency-based models and a state-coordinated intermediation scheme in the Austrian state of Vorarlberg (“Betreuungspool Vorarlberg”). The dataset comprises interviews with live-in caregivers, family members, and employees of the state-run pool, allowing us to explore how different forms of intermediation relate to the organization of care labour. We would like to present and discuss our findings.

Our analysis shows that different forms of intermediation entail distinct modes of boundary work. Private agencies tend to position themselves at the margins of the household, framing care primarily as a contractual and economic arrangement and leaving the negotiation of everyday conflicts largely to families and caregivers. In contrast, the state-coordinated model assumes a more active role through matching processes, home visits, and conflict mediation, thereby crossing into the domestic sphere and redistributing responsibility for the functioning of the care arrangement. Rather than fully de-commodifying care, this involvement reconfigures how boundaries between market, public responsibility, and family obligation are negotiated in practice.

G-VIII: Decent Migrant Care Work: Blurred Boundaries, Tensions and Alliances

22 October 2026 | 11.30–13.15 | Room T-401

Chair: Katarzyna Zajda (University of Lodz)

Manhal Ali, Zinovius Ciupijus, Christopher Forde, Andrew Kozhevnikov, Heila Sha, Vera Trappmann, Jonathan Winterton, Chunyu Xiu (University of Leeds):

Skills shortages and migrant workers in the United Kingdom: A skill-matching perspective

Many developed countries have experienced labour and skills shortages because of, inter alia, ageing population, changing career preferences and inadequate investment in locally available human capital. In the UK the situation is further aggravated by Brexit, although some industries (e.g., healthcare) are more affected than other. Such shortages are frequently addressed by relying on migrant workers, although with mixed outcomes for both employers and employees. This paper seeks to explore, understand and explain experiences of non-EU migrant workers in the UK, with a specific focus on (mis)match between human capital in their possession and human capital required and rewarded by employers, drawing upon UK-specific data from a larger cross-national Horizon Europe research project.

Skill-matching theory is deployed and advanced. Within this analytical framework, the labour market (which can be explored on the national sectoral, occupational or organsiational levels) is the forum wherein the supply of human capital – understood as the volume and quality of skills, knowledge, talents, aptitudes, competencies and ‘knack’ - is compared and juxtaposed with demand for those skills and talents. Where labour shortages are apparent, employers have three classic options to resolve the shortages: recruit migrant workers; train the existing workforce; or introduce automation. High-quality matches between human capital possessed by individuals and required by organisations can lead to positive outcomes for workers (e.g., better job satisfaction and lower stress) and their employers (e.g., higher performance and lower turnover), whereas bad matches have the opposite effect.

The first analytical stage focused on official secondary data on five sectors employing substantial numbers of migrant workers in the UK: education; health and social care; energy transition; construction; and agriculture. Following that, representatives were interviewed (n=48) from employers, higher education and vocational training institutions, policy-making bodies, labour market intermediaries and trade unions. Next, a survey of (n=300) and in-depth individual interviews with migrant workers (n=50) were undertaken to explore their lived experience.

The results from the ongoing analysis reflect the diversity of migrant workers’ experiences in the UK. Higher levels of education (PhD), as well as locally recognised qualifications to practise relatively regulated (e.g., nurses) or in-demand (e.g., teachers) occupations tend to result in better matches. At the same time, other qualifications (even obtained in the UK) or their absence are more likely to result in professional downgrading/underemployment, involuntary career changes or periods of unemployment, especially if coupled with the lack of local work experiences and/or refugee status. Whereas some reported painful dissatisfaction with the human capital mismatch, some others were able to reconcile with it through lowering their expectations or focusing on the other subjective and objective outcomes (e.g., new experiences, financial security, work-life balance).

Overall, the paper advances skill-matching theory and offers novel empirical insights from a mixed-methods approach. It advances our understanding of migrants’ experiences in post-Brexit/post-Covid Britain and contributes to explaining those experiences and their outcomes for different groups of migrant workers.

Oksana Dutchak (Institute for Systemic Alternatives); **Olena Fedyuk** (CareOrg Project); **Anna Oksiutovych** (Goethe University Frankfurt):

Care Dreams and Care Inequalities: how Ukrainian Geriatric Caregivers in Italy Imagine Their Old Age

Rooted in the structural inequalities - historical, geographical, class and gender - the phenomenon of care labor chain, including that between Ukraine and Italy, has been researched in its multiple manifestations and implications, including inequalities of care it amplifies. While care inequalities are mainly approached in the research from the perspective of transnational care chains - where arrangement of senior care in those economically better-off European countries creates care drain in the countries at the bottom of care chains - there is yet another important dimension of care inequality, embedded in the transnational organization of senior care. Ukrainian women have been working as geriatric caregivers in Italy for over three decades now: many of the firstcomers have aged themselves, and overall Ukrainian care migrants tend to be older than those coming from elsewhere. While the aging of migrants has attracted some attention in migration studies, aging of senior care migrants and their imagining of aging and senior care mostly stayed beyond the focus. At the same time, their embeddedness in transnational elderly care chains creates a unique vantage point to grasp the systemic inequalities which not only channel care migration and create uneven access to care in sending and receiving countries, but also structure another care inequality in what is coming after - the aging of migrants themselves. In this paper we analyze elderly care migrants’ narratives and strategies in relation to elderly care for their relatives, as well as images and dreams about their future and care of them in older age. We research how their professional trajectories and experiences, together with the structural inequalities of transnational care chains, impact their understanding of the possible and desirable in old age.

G-VIII: Decent Migrant Care Work: Blurred Boundaries, Tensions and Alliances

22 October 2026 | 11.30–13.15 | Room T-401

Chair: Katarzyna Zajda (University of Lodz)

Anna Sadowska (Maria Curie-Sklodowska University):

Care Practices for Older People in Poland: Between Accessibility, Informality and Working Conditions

Home care for older people in Poland is increasingly organised at the intersection of formal and informal labour, family responsibility, migration processes, and long-term care deficits. This paper examines paid home care for older people as a social practice rather than as a set of individual actions performed by carers and families. It draws on qualitative research conducted by the author within the PERHOUSE project – Personal and Household Services in Central and Eastern European Countries: Improving Working Conditions and Services through Industrial Relations (2022–2024) – further developed through subsequent theoretical work and continued analysis of current care trends.

Using social practice theory (Shove, Pantzar and Watson, 2012), the author analyses the mechanisms that organise and sustain paid home care in Poland, including both registered and unregistered forms of work. This perspective makes it possible to move beyond macro-level explanations and examine the everyday organisation of care, as well as its consequences for both care workers and people receiving care. The analysis highlights how home care is shaped by migration, limited access to long-term care services, the privatisation and familialisation of care responsibility, and inequalities in access to social and health resources.

The author argues that home care simultaneously compensates for systemic deficits and reproduces social inequalities, tensions, and risks. By reconstructing the interdependencies embedded in care arrangements, the paper contributes to current debates on decent care work, blurred boundaries between formal and informal labour, and the social organisation of elder care in Central and Eastern Europe.

The PERHOUSE project was carried out between 2022 and 2024 with funding from the European Union (Grant No. 101052340).

G-IX: Young Workers, Social Class and the Changing Experiences of Work

22 October 2026 | 16.30–18.00 | Room C-101

Chair: Justyna Zielińska (Maria Grzegorzewska University)

Piotr Borys (University of Warsaw):

Class consciousness of young people employed in the food service industry

In my speech I will introduce a study concerning class consciousness of young people employed in the food service industry. Utilizing available theoretical perspectives, I will analyze the results and relate the concept of class consciousness to the reality of Polish gastronomical scene.

Aforementioned sector unites people derived from diverse backgrounds, with different class positions and life goals. I will base the work on in depth interviews conducted with possibly most varied research group. I will put emphasis on: Working conditions and their influence on life besides it, opinion on workers' rights and the state of the labour market, finally - on the role that current employment takes in their life.

Inspired by the grounded theory, I will aim for theoretical saturation of said categories. I will analyze the results referring to theoretical frames proposed by, among others, Pierre Bourdieu, E. O. Wright and Michael Mann.

Work in the food service industry is characterized by precariousness and harsh conditions. At the same time, these aspects of employment (such as elasticity of the work schedule, or late working hours) are commonly listed as benefits, for example by students forced to combine working with studying.

Rafał Marchwacki, Katarzyna Gdesz, Wojciech Kijanowski (University of Warsaw):

A New Generation in the Labour Market: Reconceptualising the Notion of the Working Class Based on New Strategies of Resistance

Trade unions, long regarded as the central hub for planning and coordinating workers’ resistance, have seen a dramatic decline in membership over the years. CBOS research leaves no doubt that the youngest cohort lags far behind older employees when it comes to unionization among wage earners: by the end of 2025, in the 18 to 24 age group, the figure stood at just 4%. Such findings may invite the suspicion that young people in manual occupations have little interest in protest or workplace resistance or, more broadly, in efforts aimed at improving employment conditions and living standards. This, in turn, casts doubt on whether it still makes sense to use the concept of the working class amid growing employment precarity and changes in the organization of the labour process. The proposed presentation confronts these assumptions with empirical reality. Biographical interviews conducted as part of recurring seminars devoted to the young people from the working classes reveal a shift in what resistance means today. Rather than taking the form of collective confrontation, it increasingly appears as dispersed practice. In participants’ narratives, a crucial role is played by the “exit” strategy: quitting quickly when exploitation or disrespect is experienced, treated as a primary instrument of agency. Micro-sabotage and small acts of retaliation are common strategies - ones that do not escalate into open conflict, yet allow workers to regain a sense of control within relations of unequal power. Equally important is the refusal to normalize risk and organizational pathology: an uncompromising rejection of tasks that threaten health, and the direct communication of one’s boundaries. The prominence of “reclaiming time” suggests that apparent passivity can function as a survival strategy within a system of senseless hierarchies. The theoretical framework for interpreting these issues draws on labour process theory as developed by Harry Braverman, which helps to capture transformations in work organization and mechanisms of control under late capitalism, as well as on a conception of power and surveillance inspired by Michel Foucault, enabling an interpretation of dispersed forms of control and the corresponding micro-practices of resistance. This perspective is supplemented by post-Operaismo accounts of labour’s autonomy, developed among others by Antonio Negri, which highlight the growing significance of mobility and individualized strategies of refusal under conditions of unstable employment. The analysis suggests that contemporary transformations of work do not entail the disappearance of the working class, but rather the need to redefine it in the context of new technologies of control and flexible forms of employment.

G-IX: Young Workers, Social Class and the Changing Experiences of Work

22 October 2026 | 16.30–18.00 | Room C-101

Chair: Justyna Zielińska (Maria Grzegorzewska University)

Aniela Partyga, Julia Gorczowska, Wiktoria Karczewska, Mateusz Mojsiejuk (University of Warsaw):

Autonomy despite necessity: narratives of popular class youth on entrepreneurship and democratic institutions

Contemporary biographical narratives of young people from popular-class backgrounds increasingly include motifs that can be read as an “approximation” to middle-class patterns. Aspirations to work “on one’s own terms,” along with the uptake of psychological, coaching, and entrepreneurial discourses, may seem to align their outlooks with hegemonic bourgeois norms. Yet this is not straightforward assimilation: these repertoires are adopted selectively and embedded in practices shaped by interviewees’ social position, unequal access to capital, and the material conditions of work and dependence in the workplace. Middle-class narratives of self-realisation and entrepreneurship are thus partly “accepted” under constraint, and their meaning is set less by a middle-class ideal than by a popular-class habitus oriented toward coping, avoiding dependence, and sustaining dignity amid unstable transitions to adulthood.

Our empirical material consists of biographical interviews with young people of popular-class origin and position, conducted in 2025 and a decade earlier. The time gap enables reflection on change and internal differentiation within the young popular classes. We focus on themes that appear in the newer interviews, while in those from a decade ago, they are absent or framed differently, and we trace how they relate to work experience and the reproduction of class position.

We examine (the lack of) identification with the categories of employee and entrepreneur; how similar jobs acquire different meanings depending on class position and biographical horizon; and the need for autonomy and, more broadly, making a living “on one’s own terms”. This autonomy cannot be reduced to economic pragmatism; it reveals a distinctive value system linked to one’s place in the social structure. “Managing on one’s own” functions as work on dignity: it helps save face and avoid the position of a supplicant, turning structural necessity into a virtue of self-reliance where unequal distributions of capital set the horizon of possibilities. Importantly, the desire to “make it on one’s own” should not be read simply as individualism or a survival strategy – popular-class “entrepreneurship” remains a collective, bond-building practice that combines community with needs for dignity and creativity.

Likewise, scepticism toward democratic institutions (and, in some narratives, toward the EU) can be read not as an “anti-democratic reflex,” but as a situated critique rooted in everyday encounters with the state and the labour market that cast doubt on the impartiality of the rules of the game. What emerges is an ambivalent worldview: criticism of the formalism, distance, “complication,” and impersonality of bureaucracy, yet not always a rejection of the need for universal structures. This perspective highlights a system sustained by an unfulfilled promise of equal opportunities that, in fact, legitimises the class order.

Paulina Wrzesińska (University of Lodz):

Emotions in the recruitment process. The perspective of young recruited persons

This bachelor's thesis focuses on the emotions experienced by students of the University of Łódź during the recruitment process for selected job positions. Emotions, although difficult to define unequivocally, play a significant role in shaping social relationships and individual perception of one's own competencies in a professional context. The research problem of the paper concerns the identification of the most common emotions during recruitment and the analysis of the influence of previous experiences on the emotional experiences of candidates. The main goal of the study was to understand the nature of emotions accompanying the various stages of recruitment — from submitting an application, through interviews, to waiting for the final result — and their impact on the perception of one's own competences and professional decisions. The research was conducted using a qualitative method, with free-form, non-directional interviews. The analysis of empirical material was conducted through open and selective coding, which allowed for the identification of key categories and stress coping strategies. The results of the research showed that the dominant emotion during recruitment is stress, which appears at all stages. Positive experiences strengthen the candidates' confidence, while negative ones deepen their uncertainty. Previous recruitment experiences significantly influence the intensity and nature of the emotions experienced, as well as the preparation for the next stages and subsequent recruitments. Another important factor is the attitude of the recruiter, which can either alleviate or intensify the stress of the candidates. The paper emphasizes the importance of emotions as a key element of the recruitment process and points to the need to take them into account when designing recruitment procedures.

G-X: Changing Experiences and Meanings of Work

22 October 2026 | 16.30–18.00 | Room C-140

Chair: Łukasz Marciniak (University of Lodz)

Elif Kaşık (Siirt University):

From the Meaning Crisis of Work to Quiet Quitting: Why Do Engineers and Teachers Feel ‘Stuck in Between’?

Rather than considering the concept of quiet quitting as a new phenomenon, this study argues that while the concept is recent, the phenomenon itself is closely linked to the meaning crisis of work. Building on this premise, the study investigates which professional and organizational structures in 21st-century new capitalism erode the meaning of work, thereby leading to quiet quitting. The aim of the research is to consider both subjective (professional) and objective (organizational) conditions affecting the meaning of work together. In the literature, these conditions are often studied separately. However, examining them collectively, as interacting and interdependent factors, and revealing their sociological roots allows for an exploration of both the professional boundaries and organizational meanings of work. This approach elucidates the conditions and processes that trigger a crisis in the meaning of work and how quiet quitting is experienced as a state of “being stuck in between.”

Based on in-depth interviews conducted with 16 engineers and 11 teachers working in Istanbul, the study explores experiences, processes, and relationships that constitute the meaning of work, taking into account variables such as professional experience, sector, field, gender, and age. According to findings analyzed using the MAXQDA qualitative data analysis software, while the reasons for both work meaning and quiet quitting vary across the two professions, notable commonalities emerge in experiences related to professional and organizational structures. Based on these commonalities, the study proposes a threefold classification of the sources of work meaning, which also protects against the meaning crisis: strong, moderate, and weak. Strong sources of work meaning include religious beliefs, professional satisfaction, passion for the profession, generating value, usefulness, respect, social interaction, professional self-confidence, and professional ethics. Moderate sources include salary, relationships with colleagues, relationships with employers (engineers), relationships with parents and administration (teachers), professional reputation, and feelings of autonomy and freedom. Weak sources include flexible working hours, physical conditions, and leave/vacation policies. Positive effects of these factors enhance the meaning of work, whereas negative effects contribute to the erosion of work meaning and foster quiet quitting behaviors.

Michał Pilc, Beata Woźniak-Jęchorek (Poznań University of Economics and Business);
Yana van der Meulen Rodgers (Rutgers University):

Remote Work and Job Attractiveness for Mothers with Care Responsibilities: A Survey-Based Experiment in Six EU Countries

The literature suggests that remote work can increase the activity levels of mothers with caregiving responsibilities. However, that literature largely focused on the period during and immediately after the COVID-19 pandemic, when interest in remote work was generally heightened or even over-optimistic. The study aims to measure the attractiveness of this form of work among mothers six years after the onset of the pandemic, when the benefits and drawbacks of this form of work are widely known to the public. It is based on a CAWI survey with an experiment in which respondents are asked to assess the attractiveness of randomly generated job offers, with one attribute specifying the number of days they can work remotely. The survey will be conducted in March 2026. It will cover six EU countries: France, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, and Sweden, which are diverse culturally and with respect to family policy. The survey will include 300 respondents with at least one child under 6 years old and 300 respondents without children under 6, but with at least one child aged 6 to 11, in every country (these numbers may be lower in the Netherlands).

The results of a pilot study conducted in November 2025 with 189 mothers indicate that the number of days that can be worked remotely (along with compensation) has, on average, the greatest impact on job attractiveness. In fact, the more hours women report spending on caregiving duties, the more attractive remote work is to them. Furthermore, the attractiveness of remote work interacts with temporal flexibility: the more freedom mothers have in deciding their working hours, the more attractive remote work becomes to them. In this context, it is also not surprising that, according to the initial results, the possibility of working remotely increases the attractiveness of the 40-hour working week. Finally, the attractiveness of remote work seems to be highest in countries where caregiving duties are culturally expected to be performed by women: Romania, Italy, and Poland. While in Sweden, the effect of remote work is almost irrelevant.

Overall, the initial results suggest that remote work remains an attractive option for mothers, facilitating their willingness to reintegrate into the labour market. Yet, it remains to be checked whether the final survey will confirm these results.

G-X: Changing Experiences and Meanings of Work

22 October 2026 | 16.30–18.00 | Room C-140

Chair: Łukasz Marciniak (University of Lodz)

Mateusz Smoter (Institute for Structural Research):

Flexible Work Arrangements and Career Penalties for Men and Women. Evidence from a Vignette Study in Poland

Flexible work arrangements, which allow employees to decide when and where they work, are often promoted as a means of facilitating work - life balance, particularly for parents. However, employees who use flexible work arrangements may face a flexibility stigma that negatively affects their career outcomes.

Using an online survey and vignette experiment, this study examines whether employees who use flexible work arrangements face a flexibility stigma in promotion decisions. Employees working in occupations in which telework is possible (groups 1 - 5 of the ISCO classification) were invited to participate in the study. Each participant evaluated six fictitious candidates applying for a managerial position. The candidates varied by gender and by their use of flexible work arrangements (e.g., working from home or flexible schedules).

The results show that candidates who use flexible work arrangements face a flexibility stigma: they are less likely to be recommended for promotion, are offered lower salaries, and are more likely to be perceived as less committed to the organisation and less respected by their teams.

The findings also show that the flexibility stigma differs depending on the gender of the candidate. Female candidates who use flexible work arrangements are more often perceived as doing so for family - related reasons, whereas male candidates are more often perceived as using flexible work arrangements for performance - enhancing purposes. Consequently, the negative effects of flexible work arrangements on promotion and salary recommendations are stronger for women than for men.

This study contributes to the literature on flexible work arrangements and gender. The findings suggest that managers and coworkers rely on gender role stereotypes when evaluating the use of flexible work arrangements. As a result, women’s use of such arrangements is more often interpreted as prioritising family over work, which leads to stronger career penalties.

Abstract 059

Katarzyna Waniek (University of Lodz):

The contemporary potential of the ‘old’ Chicago school categories with regard to work

This presentation aims to analyse the 'old' categories developed or inspired by the Chicago School of Sociology that refer to 'work', but which have either been forgotten or overlooked, or have been systematically replaced by newer, more ‘fashionable’ terms. This discussion will examine two such concepts: first, the analytical vocabulary developed by Anselm Strauss and his colleagues in a medical context; and second, Everett Hughes's notion of liaison communication, which Fritz Schütze further developed into the concept of liaison work in the context of international communication. Both seem to be this kind of work that is often unnoticed, underappreciated, and unpaid, yet nevertheless necessary for the effective or successful execution of other (usually paid) tasks, which are often remunerated. This first one, will be exemplified, on the one hand, by ‘sentimental work’ employed to denote a range of activities, including interactional work, moral rule work, trust work, composure work, biographical work, identity work, awareness context work, and rectification work. On the other hand, by the difference between the ‘routine’ actions and ‘contingency’. The primary focus will be on this kind of work, which is often unnoticed, underappreciated and unpaid yet nevertheless necessary for the effective execution of other tasks, which are usually paid. This will be, on the one hand, exemplified by 'sentimental work', which denotes a range of activities including interactional work, moral rule work, trust work, composure work, biographical work, identity work, awareness context work and rectification work. On the other hand, it will be explored through the distinction between ‘routine’ and ‘contingency’ actions. The second one is liaison work, which is essential in intercultural communication. This relies on translating differences in cultural codes, which are understood as resources for interpretation that facilitate the definition and meaning of reality. It also involves defining and explaining the viewpoints of interaction partners. The present endeavour is an attempt to critically reflect on these concepts and demonstrate their potential for application in the contemporary socio-cultural context.

G-XI: Gender, Precarity and the Changing Experiences of Work

22 October 2026 | 16.30–18.00 | Room T-301

Chair: Bartosz Mika (University of Gdańsk)

Aniela Bocheńska (University of Warsaw):

An Intersectional Perspective in Exclusion Studies: The Everyday Life of Professionally Active Women in a Partially Transport-Isolated Former State Agricultural Farm Area

What role can intersectional conceptualization of social exclusion play in Poland's multi-level socially unified reality? I posed this question during research for my master's thesis, supervised by Professor Agnieszka Kościańska. In 2024 I conducted fieldwork in a partially transport-inaccessible former state-owned farm area. As part of this research, I conducted 28 interviews with professionally active women living there. I was interested in how they experienced their everyday lives in all their aspects. At a theoretical level, I conceptualized the social realities they experienced as involving intersectional exclusion – economic, transportation, and gender. In my paper I will show how the concept of intersectionality of exclusion, borrowed from American feminist-researchers, helped me research, understand and describe the everyday life of women living in Polish former state-owned farm areas affected by partial transport exclusion.

Aneta Pieczka, Miłosz Miszczyński (Kozminski University):

Managing by Precarity: An Intersectional Analysis of Organisation of Work in Polish Warehousing Sector

Precarity has become a central concept in contemporary analyses of work and employment, evolving from its association with the erosion of social institutions to encompass a wider array of processes fueling the rise of insecurity among workers. While traditionally, precarity has been understood as a linear, static continuum ranging from decent work to extreme exploitation, more recent works see it as a recursive and relational process, shaped and sustained by institutional, political, and organizational forces.

In this article, we explore how precarity functions within the organization of work, examining relationships between workforce and management. We concentrate on managerial discretion, analyzing how managers recognize and understand workers’ precarious positions when hiring and organizing work. We argue that precarity is not a side effect of organizational activity but is operationalized through managerial practices, becoming particularly evident in logistical chains, where efficiency imperatives are translated into labour insecurity. In doing so, we adopt intersectional perspective to explain how various social categories such as gender, origin, class, age and economic status are interrelated and mutually shape one another, at the same time being central to managerial discretion.

To show the centrality of management in producing precarity we rely on a qualitative research that we have conducted in three warehouses in Poland, including 64 interviews. In our analysis precarity emerges as an implicit yet shifting organizational imperative operationalized to adapt, control and structure the workforce. We show that within this configuration organizations play a key role by exploiting favorable policy frameworks, group-specific identities and the infrastructures of migration shaped by geopolitical crises, thereby directly contributing to the creation and reinforcement of precarious working and employment conditions.

Drawing on intersectional theory, we aim to contribute to the debate on precarity by broadening its conceptualization. This study advances the literature by processually uncovering how management, through daily operations, leverages intersecting identities as instruments of organization, moving beyond systemic understanding of precarity as mere labour insecurity. In doing so, we highlight how precarization emerges through the overlapping systems of oppression embedded in workplace practices, intertwined with institutional and migratory frameworks that shape power relations. Our analysis also shows how precarity operates within Poland’s patchwork capitalist economy.

G-XI: Gender, Precarity and the Changing Experiences of Work

22 October 2026 | 16.30–18.00 | Room T-301

Chair: Bartosz Mika (University of Gdańsk)

Ksawery Olczyk (University of Lodz):

Precarious work as a lifestyle – between coping with labour market and experiencing unstable life

In my study, I focus on the biographical experiences of young workers engaged in precarious forms of employment. The interviews are conducted in accordance with the autobiographical narrative interview method developed by Fritz Schütze. In this presentation, I concentrate on one specific aspect of the research project, namely the ways in which work is narrated and analyzing the conceptual categories employed by participants and the experiences they associate with work in their narratives. In the conducted interviews, respondents use a variety of formulations to describe their employment. They speak of it not only as work, but also as a lifestyle, an experience, a problem, or a life opportunity. The selection of these terms depends on the mode of constructing the utterance, which—following Schütze’s methodological framework—can be analytically distinguished as a communicative schema (narrative, descriptive, argumentative). In some cases, despite the absence of a direct question, participants do not address the topic of work at all, even though it significantly organizes their everyday lives and biographical choices. What may also be interesting is how people do not problematize their precarious status, and how they think about it in terms of ‘obviousness’ that is not worth mentioning at all. In other instances, work becomes the central motif of the interview and is presented as a lifestyle closely linked to specific character traits, which may contribute to the construction of a sense of uniqueness regarding one’s position in an insecure labour market, along with all its consequences. For the participants, unstable employment is not merely a means of obtaining financial resources nor solely an instrument for implementing a biographical action scheme. At times, it acquires the status of an autotelic value, in which remaining in instability and engaging in permanent searching become ends in themselves. Instability is often associated with the category of freedom: precariousness experienced in the labour market is presented as a necessary price to be paid for the possibility of “self-realisation.” Narrative fragments concerning engagement in unstable employment reveal a complex interweaving of passivity and euphoria, a desire for intense experiences, and fatigue resulting from their excess. Coping with permanent biographical ambiguity generates only an illusory sense of agency. Combined with the absence of perceived systemic alternatives, this pushing individuals towards trajectory mechanisms.

G-XI: Gender, Precarity and the Changing Experiences of Work

22 October 2026 | 16.30–18.00 | Room T-301

Chair: Bartosz Mika (University of Gdańsk)

Paulina Sekuła, Aleksandra Migalska (Jagiellonian University in Krakow):

Lived experiences of precarity: the gendered paths of precariousness in Italian and Polish academia

Globally, the organisation of scientific work has undergone profound transformation. The neoliberal turn in science policy, aimed at increasing the competitiveness of research organisations and national research systems, has introduced audit regimes, metric-based evaluation and managerial governance, while simultaneously reducing stable public funding and increasing financial uncertainty. A central consequence of these shifts is the growing prevalence of unstable and insecure employment in academia, driven largely by dependence on short-term external funding such as competitive grants. As a result, job precarity has become a structural feature of contemporary higher education. Rather than constituting a brief transitional phase for early-career researchers, precarious employment increasingly extends well into mid-career stages.

These conditions do not remain confined to employment arrangements. Precarity often spills over into other spheres of life, producing broader forms of existential insecurity (Armano and Murgia 2013). While deteriorating working conditions affect researchers across institutions and disciplines, precarity also reproduces and amplifies gender inequalities. Studies show that women tend to be more severely affected by its consequences (O’Keefe and Courtois 2019) and face greater barriers to accessing stable academic positions (Picardi 2019). This calls for moving beyond a narrow focus on employment contracts and career stages toward understanding precarity as both a structural condition that reproduces inequalities and a pervasive academic culture that normalises insecurity (Burton and Bowman 2022).

Against this background, this chapter investigates how researchers experience and interpret precarious working conditions across career stages, disciplines and gender in two national contexts: Italy and Poland. We argue that precarity is not only an employment condition but also a lived and normalised aspect of academic life that shapes career trajectories, everyday practices and private lives. Drawing on the model of the three dimensions of the precarious (Perez and Montoya 2018), we analyse how individual experiences are structured and how discourses within academia contribute to the normalisation of precarious work.

The analysis is based on qualitative data collected in 2020–2021 within the Horizon 2020 project MINDtheGEPs. The dataset comprises 76 semi-structured interviews with early- and advanced-career researchers and 38 expert interviews with organisational stakeholders across four research organisations in Italy and Poland. Despite growing attention to precarious academic labour, cross-national analyses beyond the Anglo-Saxon context remain limited, and studies including Central and Eastern European countries are still relatively rare.

Armano, Emilliana and Annalisa Murgia (2013), ‘The precariousnesses of young knowledge workers: a subject-oriented approach’, *Global Discourse*, 3 (3–4), 486–501.

Burton, Sarah and Benjamin Bowman (2022), ‘The academic precariat: understanding life and labour in the neoliberal academy’, *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 43 (4), 497–512.

O’Keefe, Theresa and Aline Courtois (2019), ‘“Not one of the family”: Gender and precarious work in the neoliberal university’, *Gender, Work & Organization*, 26 (4), 463–479.

Perez, Marta and Ainhua Montoya (2018), ‘The unsustainability of the neoliberal public university: towards an ethnography of precarity in academia’, *Disparidades. Revista de Antropología*, 73 (1), A1–A16.

Picardi, Ilenia (2019), ‘The glass door of academia: Unveiling new gendered bias in academic recruitment’, *Social Sciences*, 8 (5), 160.

G-XII: Ombuds Insights on Changing Meanings of Work

22 October 2026 | 16.30–18.00 | Room T-401

Chair: Dominika Polkowska (Maria Curie-Skłodowska University)

Zuzana Andreska (Charles University):

Managing Feelings, Managing Conflict: The Hidden Emotional Politics of Ombuds Practice

Certain professions are expected to act with empathy—such as doctors, therapists, or flight attendants—while others, most notably judges, are expected to demonstrate impartiality through apparent dispassion (Maroney 2011). Yet even professions associated with dispassion are not devoid of emotion; rather, emotions function as orienting and motivating forces that must be actively managed (Wettergren; Bergman Blix 2016).

The ideal of judicial dispassion, traditionally associated with courts and legal decision-making (Maroney 2011), has recently been translated into a new organizational context through the establishment of organizational ombuds roles. Organizational ombuds are tasked with receiving complaints, conducting impartial inquiries, reporting findings, and facilitating just and equitable resolutions (McKee & Belson 1990). In performing this role, ombuds rely on empathy to build trust, elicit accounts, and engage with multiple parties. However, empathy expressed as role-taking is frequently conflated with identification or alignment, giving rise to doubts about ombuds’ impartiality and independence.

Existing scholarship has primarily examined ombuds offices in higher education institutions in the United States (Pappas 2021), Canada (Johns & Epperson 2022), the United Kingdom, and Australia (Evers & Kamvounias 2025), where ombuds typically operate in non-investigative capacities. In contrast, in Central and Eastern Europe, ombuds roles often combine consultative and investigative functions. In the Czech context, the number of higher education ombuds increased from six in 2022 to over sixty in 2026, with a similar trend observed in Poland (Gmurzyńska 2023).

The rapid emergence of this profession, occupied by individuals from both within and outside academia and drawing on diverse professional backgrounds such as psychology and law, offers a valuable case for examining strategies of professional emotion management. Applying the concept of judicial dispassion to a role often described as “the judiciary within an organization,” this paper analyzes how organizational ombuds navigate the tension between compassion and dispassion. The analysis draws on interviews with 25 organizational ombuds and the author’s ethnographic field notes.

Anna Cybulko (University of Warsaw):

The institution of the academic ombudsman as a tool for diagnosing the changing needs and behaviours of university employees. A comparison of the Polish and Scandinavian contexts

The tasks of academic ombudsmen include supporting the academic community in resolving problems that arise in the workplace, such as conflicts, violations of academic principles and values, and violations of employees’ rights or well-being. In the course of their duties, ombudsmen gain unique insight into the problems, needs, and expectations of the academic community. Of particular importance in this regard may be conclusions concerning the structural characteristics of labor relations—imbalances of power, informal networks, and emerging conflicts—which may form the basis for broader sociological debates on work, social integration, and organizational transformation.

Academic ombudspersons have been operating at Polish universities for almost 15 years, which allows them to observe changes in declared needs and values, as well as typical behavior patterns of employees and representatives of the authorities. The paper will examine the results of research based on an analysis of academic ombudspersons’ observations regarding changes in the organizational culture of universities. The data for analysis will be drawn from in-depth interviews with individuals who currently hold or have held the position of academic ombudspersons, as well as through the analysis of publicly available ombudspersons’ reports and accounts. Based on the aggregated data, possible trends will be reconstructed, illustrating changes in needs and expectations in the areas of DEI, as well as in power relations and perceptions of work-life balance.

The study will include a comparative aspect: the observations of Polish ombudspersons will be compared with those of ombudspersons at Scandinavian universities. In Norway and Denmark, the first academic ombudspersons institutions were established at around the same time as in Poland, i.e., at the beginning of the second decade of the 21st century, but there were and still are many differences between the organizational cultures of Polish and Scandinavian universities, which generates a wide scope for comparative analysis.

By bringing together theoretical, empirical and comparative perspectives, the paper is to illuminate the growing sociological significance of ombuds practice and its potential contribution to deepening insight into the evolution of labor relations in the academic environment.

G-XII: Ombuds Insights on Changing Meanings of Work

22 October 2026 | 16.30–18.00 | Room T-401

Chair: Dominika Polkowska (Maria Curie-Skłodowska University)

Jan Gałkowski (University of Rzeszów):

Ombuds as Boundary Actors: Redefining the Meaning of Work in Czech and Polish Universities

The rapid institutional transformation of Central European universities has unsettled established meanings of academic work, authority, and employee voice. In this context, academic ombuds offices – recently institutionalised in Czech and Polish universities – emerge as both symptoms and drivers of changing expectations toward work. This paper examines how ombuds themselves perceive their influence on organisational culture and the evolving moral boundaries of academic labour.

The contribution is conceptual and theoretically informed, grounded in semi-structured interviews with Czech and Polish academic ombuds affiliated with Akademicka Sieć Bezpieczeństwa i Równości (ASBiR, Poland) and Školská Ombuds Platforma (ŠOP, Czechia). Drawing on boundary theory in the sociology of work, neo-institutionalism, and organisational culture theory, the paper conceptualises ombuds as “boundary actors”: independent yet embedded professionals who mediate between formal governance structures and lived experiences of academic staff and students. Their position allows them to reinterpret conflicts, stress, discrimination, and perceptions of injustice not merely as individual grievances but as indicators of structural tensions within the contemporary university.

The analysis addresses three questions: (1) How do ombuds perceive their role in shaping positive organisational change? (2) What conditions enable them to be effective promoters of cultural transformation? (3) What structural obstacles constrain their influence? Findings suggest that although ombuds work remains a young profession in Central Europe, it is widely welcomed within academic communities as a long-awaited mechanism of dignity, psychological safety, and procedural fairness. Success is facilitated by institutional autonomy, leadership support, and professional networking across national platforms. However, hierarchical legacies, lack of understanding for the core principles of their work (independence, impartiality, informality, confidence) and ambiguous mandates restrict transformative potential.

Empirically grounded yet normatively engaged, the paper argues that ombuds offices contribute to redefining the meaning of academic work – from a narrow focus on “productivity” toward an expanded expectation of care, fairness, and participatory governance. In doing so, they reshape the social boundaries of work within post-socialist higher education systems.

Martina Kolářová Veverková (Charles University):

Work as anchor in Times of Crisis – Czech workers’ subjectivity through the Covid-19 pandemic

The idea of a neoliberal subject, always prepared to navigate challenges of the labour market and continuously outperform (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005, Sennett 2006), while managing their own exposure to risks (Lupton 2023), has been perpetually challenged by the reality of the crises of the 21st century (Du Gay and Morgan 2013, Fleming 2025). This calls for conceptualizing new forms of subjectivity, moving beyond the concept of entrepreneurial self.

We argue that the Covid-19 pandemic is a strong case to research new forms of subjectivity, given its strong impact on people’s lives and work and diverging interpretations of risk in the context of the crisis. However, in the current body of research, examples of studies linking experience of work and risk perception remain scarce.

Drawing on 29 in-depth interviews with Czech employees capturing their both work-related and personal experience and perception of the Covid-19 pandemic, this paper aims to connect two traditions of research on subjectivity – work-related and risk-related – to capture workers’ understanding of the crisis and perception of the self.

Among other identified risks, workers tend to see the crisis as a threat to their position at work and economic standing, more so than a threat to their health (risk of virus contagion at work). They perceive themselves as actors having almost no control over the general situation, submitting to or circumventing the imposed rules. On the other hand, they are actively navigating the specific situations that happen to them to protect themselves from the worst consequences. This urge of self-preservation in a crisis is intertwined with a continuation of paid work, which functions as a cornerstone of stability in both practical and emotional terms. Alternatives, such as benefitting from government support schemes, are largely absent from the narrations. The state is perceived as a legitimate authority to issue containment measures, but also an errant and incompetent actor, putting disproportionate pressure on citizens and undermining social cohesion. Whereas the government steps are criticized unapologetically, the workers are more careful when talking about their employers, recognizing that they have the right to impose rules and obligations to the employees, and in this sense, they emerge as a more respected authority than the state.

We argue that this configuration – characterized by limited worker agency and the centrality of paid work and employers’ authority – may inadvertently constrain collective responses to crisis situations. At the same time, it sheds light on the sources of disagreement and controversy surrounding contemporary crises by revealing how crisis perceptions are filtered through work-centred subjectivities.

Book Panel

22 October 2026 | Time not specified in the programme | Library, building E, room E 318
Chair: Adam Mrozowicki (University of Wrocław)

Book Panel:

*Global Workers and Entangled Crises:
Biographical and Relational
Approaches to Resilience*

ed. by M. Varga, M. Karolak, and A. Mrozowicki Bristol University Press, Advances in
Biographical Research
Forthcoming September 2026

The book addresses, through biographic narrative interviews, how the disruptions caused by the early 2020s crises influenced vulnerable workers across fieldwork locations in Brazil, Colombia, Croatia, Germany, Poland, the US, Romania, Ukraine, and Turkey. These “entangled crises”—COVID-19, coupled with labour migration blockages and waramplified inflation—severely disrupted global work. In the Global North, public service jobs deteriorated, while in the Global South, movement restrictions devastated livelihoods, deepening fears over health risks, lockdowns, and rising living costs. We examine how vulnerable workers—migrants, ethnic minorities, and those in feminised sectors—confronted these shocks. Did disruptions weaken resistance, fostering distrust in institutions? Or did past experiences help them build resilience? Our work rethinks traditional views of resilience to turn it from a perspective that downplays the complexity of challenges to workers and their livelihoods by heroizing individual coping strategies into a tool for further exploring the vulnerability of workers. We emphasise workers’ biographical and relational resources—the skills, experiences, and networks shaping their survival strategies. These resources offer support but also impose burdens, revealing how workers endure crises while grappling with care obligations and uncertainty.

Panellists

Mateusz Karolak (University of Wrocław), **Jo Cutter** (University of Leeds), **Oksana Dutchak** (Institute for Systemic Alternatives)

G-XIII: AI Literacy as Labour: Collective Struggle and Boundary Work in Semi-Peripheral Capitalisms

23 October 2026 | 09.00–10.15 | Room C-101

Chair: Dominika Polkowska (Maria Curie-Skłodowska University)

Iga Wermińska-Wiśnicka, Olga Czeranowska (SWPS University):

Is society ready to survive the ‘future without work’?

In present times, increased use of Artificial Intelligence in work settings and automation of many professional tasks make a 'future without work' in the global North a viable option. This perspective evokes many questions concerning not only the economy, but also organisations of society and family as well as the role that work plays in individuals' biographies and identities.

Our analysis is based on the data gathered in the project The meaning of work and meaningless jobs in the context of the Polish labour market, funded by the SWPS University Research Development Fund (decision number: 50/2025/FRBN/G). A CAWI survey was conducted on a nationwide sample of a research panel (n=1016) with quotas based on population representation for the variables of gender, age, and size of locality of residence. The study took place in October 2025, the questionnaire included blocks on respondents' career trajectories, current employment situation and their hopes and fears for the future of their occupational careers and Polish labour market.

In our presentation, we will cover issues related to visions of ‘future without work’ present in the Polish labour market. We will especially focus on the public awareness of the concept of Universal Basic Income as well as opinions on this idea and arguments formulated by the supporters and opponents of UBI. We would like to gauge why the vision of not ‘obligatory’ work is so controversial in Poland. Moreover, we will also cover respondents' views on their choices in the hypothetical situation where they would have the opportunity to stop working.

We perform advanced statistical analysis to investigate dependencies and relations between one’s opinion about UBI and attitude towards ‘a future without work’.

Oana Mateescu (Babeş-Bolyai University):

AI Literacy as Epistemic Labour: Academic Work, Semi-Peripherality, and Collective Boundary-Making in Central and Eastern Europe

The rapid institutionalisation of artificial intelligence in Central and Eastern European universities is framed by managerial discourse as innovation and skills development. This paper argues that, from the standpoint of academic workers, AI enters less as a pedagogical enhancement than as a restructuring force that redistributes authority over knowledge production and intensifies labour under conditions of semi-peripheral dependency and increasing austerity in education.

Centring Romania and situating it comparatively alongside Poland, Hungary, and Bulgaria, the paper conceptualises AI literacy as epistemic labour: the socially necessary work of interpreting, translating, normalising, and contesting algorithmic systems within academic institutions. Drawing on interviews with union representatives, faculty activists, and precariously employed academics, as well as analysis of institutional AI strategies and collective statements, it asks whether and how academic workers formulate AI as a labour question rather than a technological inevitability.

The analysis shows uneven regional responses. In some cases, AI is absorbed into competitiveness agendas with limited collective engagement. In others, unions cautiously articulate positions on workload intensification, data governance, and professional autonomy. Across contexts, however, responsibility for making AI legible and governable is displaced downward, disproportionately onto precarious and feminised segments of the academic workforce.

By situating AI literacy within intersectional labour hierarchies and centre–periphery asymmetries, the paper advances a conceptualisation of digitalisation as boundary work: a struggle over who controls abstraction, who bears technological risk, and how collective authority is renegotiated in semi-peripheral capitalisms.

G-XIII: AI Literacy as Labour: Collective Struggle and Boundary Work in Semi-Peripheral Capitalisms

23 October 2026 | 09.00–10.15 | Room C-101

Chair: Dominika Polkowska (Maria Curie-Skłodowska University)

Renata Włoch (University of Warsaw):

Digital Skills as a Managerial Technology: Responsibilisation in Early AI Adoption

This paper examines how the discourse of digital and AI-related skills operates as a mechanism of responsibilisation in the context of early AI adoption in the European retail sector. While policy and managerial narratives present “AI literacy” and upskilling as necessary responses to technological change, the paper asks what kinds of responsibility are redistributed through this language, and onto whom.

The analysis draws on empirical material collected within the Horizon Europe project INAiR (2024), which investigates digital skills and AI uptake in SMEs. The study is based on nine online co-creation workshops conducted in Italy, Germany, Poland, and Romania (N=45), complemented by 13 semi-structured interviews with retail experts, technology providers, and policy stakeholders. All participating firms were at an early stage of implementing or preparing to implement AI-based tools, allowing us to capture how digital skills are framed at the moment of anticipated transformation rather than after stabilised implementation.

The findings show that upskilling and reskilling are consistently constructed as the primary solution to AI-related uncertainty. Digital skills are framed simultaneously as opportunity (enabling efficiency, innovation, and competitiveness) and as safeguard (protecting workers from displacement). However, this dual framing relocates responsibility for managing technological change from organisational strategy and institutional regulation to individual employees. Structural constraints—labour shortages, financial pressure, limited expertise—are translated into expectations of personal adaptability, continuous learning, and self-management. Workers are encouraged to “stay relevant” and maintain employability in environments increasingly shaped by algorithmic systems.

The paper argues that the discourse of digital skills functions as a moral and managerial technology that individualises risk and reframes collective or structural challenges as matters of personal competence. In semi-peripheral European contexts characterised by uneven digital maturity and limited institutional buffering capacity, this responsibilising dynamic may further intensify asymmetries between managerial authority and worker vulnerability. By conceptualising digital skills as a site of redistributed accountability rather than a neutral form of upskilling, the paper contributes to critical debates on AI literacy in the context of the governance of technological change.

G-XIII: AI Literacy as Labour: Collective Struggle and Boundary Work in Semi-Peripheral Capitalisms

23 October 2026 | 09.00–10.15 | Room C-101

Chair: Dominika Polkowska (Maria Curie-Skłodowska University)

Piotr Binder (Polish Academy of Sciences):

Reorganizing Academic Work in the Social Sciences: Generative AI and Research Workflows in the UK and Sweden

Generative AI is becoming increasingly embedded in everyday research work across the social sciences. Its application spans across paradigms and methodologies, including conceptualizing research problems, conducting literature reviews and syntheses, sourcing data and materials, performing analytic procedures, and engaging in academic writing and editing. The significance of generative AI extends beyond automating or delegating routine tasks to large language models (LLMs). Cognitive work itself is being reconfigured: sequences and rhythms of activity shift, and new (often invisible) cognitive and emotional burdens emerge.

These processes are particularly consequential within the social sciences, where writing is central to knowledge production and legitimation. The analysis draws on Hartmut Rosa’s concept of social acceleration (2013), treating generative AI as a technology that intensifies the pace of work and shortens the cycles of knowledge production. It is complemented by a sociomaterial perspective (Orlikowski, 2007), which frames AI as a set of practices, tools, and organizational arrangements that simultaneously organize work and co-constitute the technology. Against this background, this paper asks how generative AI reorganizes academic work in the social sciences.

The empirical basis includes 40 semi-structured interviews (2025–2026) conducted primarily with sociologists and scholars from related disciplines at two universities in the UK and Sweden. The core material comprises interviews with academic staff across career stages. Supplementary interviews with doctoral researchers and support staff (librarians, digital skills trainers) capture processes of skill acquisition and the diffusion of practices within academic organizations.

The analysis identifies three key mechanisms reshaping cognitive work: (1) Task reallocation and a new attention economy—delegating selected activities while shifting effort towards iterative process steering, problem framing, and integrating AI-generated outputs into scholarly products. (2) Verification work as a “second layer” of labor—acceleration is ambivalent: while content generation is expedited, the necessity to verify and repair errors slows the finalization stage; thus, potential time gains are often largely consumed by the demands of quality control. (3) Stratification of competencies—some researchers develop stable AI work regimes (tool selection, prompt formulation, critical verification, synthesis), whereas others remain occasional users or abandon AI altogether when the costs of learning outweigh the perceived benefits. A cross-national comparison shows how differing configurations of tool access, institutional policies, and support co-shape AI use in research—from distributed, bottom-up adoption to models built around centralized institutional infrastructure. These differences influence the pace of experimentation, the circulation of tool-related expertise, and the distribution of burdens across the research workflow.

Overall, generative AI reshapes the architecture of academic work by shifting it towards output steering and control, while exposing verification as a costly, often hidden layer of labor. The observed changes extend beyond academia, highlighting a broader paradox in contemporary knowledge work: mounting pressures for acceleration and productivity collide with the rising labor required to sustain credibility and quality.

G-XIV: Changing Work in Public and Cultural Institutions

23 October 2026 | 09.00–10.15 | Room C-140

Chair: Krzysztof Gorlach (Jagiellonian University in Krakow)

Aneta Głowacka (University of Silesia); **Małgorzata Marks-Krzyszkowska** (University of Lodz):

Employee Participation and the Boundaries of Agency in Public Theatres

Processes of democratization in public institutions are increasingly becoming the subject of debates concerning employees’ roles in decision-making and governance within these organizations. In the context of public theatres, the question of employee participation is particularly significant, as these institutions operate simultaneously as public organizations, artistic collectives, and workplaces characterized by complex occupational structures. This paper explores how employees of public theatres understand and evaluate processes of institutional democratization, and what opportunities and limitations they perceive in relation to their own agency and participation in organizational governance.

The empirical basis of the study consists of results from a nationwide survey conducted in the first quarter of 2026 among employees of public theatres in Poland (N=200). The survey included representatives of various occupational groups functioning within theatre institutions, including both artistic staff (actors and other artists) and non-artistic employees such as technical, administrative, and organizational personnel. The questionnaire addressed issues related to working conditions, communication between employees and theatre management, access to strategic information, the perceived influence of employees on the organization of work and artistic or programming decisions, relations between different occupational groups, levels of trust within the organization, and the occurrence of workplace conflicts.

The findings indicate a clear discrepancy between the declared idea of democratizing cultural institutions and employees’ everyday experiences of working in theatres. On the one hand, respondents emphasize the importance of greater transparency in decision-making processes, improved organizational communication, and broader employee participation in governance. On the other hand, they point to structural limitations of their agency resulting from hierarchical governance structures, the concentration of decision-making power within theatre management, and broader organizational and economic conditions shaping the functioning of public theatres. The paper demonstrates how employees’ experiences reveal the practical boundaries of democratization in cultural institutions and how they reshape relations between organizational power, professional responsibility, and forms of employee representation in the public cultural sector.

his research was funded by the National Science Centre, Poland, within the project “Democratisation Processes in Institutional Theatres in Poland: Procedures, Mechanisms and Power Relations” (grant no. 2021/43/D/HS2/01722).

Beata Nessel-Łukasik, Justyna Zielińska (Maria Grzegorzewska University):

New Ideas, Further Challenges, and the Limits of Responsibility in Polish Museum Education

The aim of this presentation is to examine the working conditions of museum educators in Poland in the context of the democratization of public cultural institutions, broader paradigm shifts in museology, and the devaluation of human resources. Over the past two decades, museums have undergone a profound transformation - from the paradigm of “old museology,” focused on collections and expert authority, to “new museology,” which emphasizes the active co-creation of narratives, meanings, and knowledge. Within this framework, four major shifts can be identified: educational, participatory, audience-oriented, and relational. Together, these shifts highlight the importance of diverse audiences, lifelong learning, social responsibility, and the role of museums in fostering a more just and inclusive society. Despite the impact of the polycrisis, these transformations are still ongoing in Poland.

Although the opening of museums to increasingly diverse publics has generated growing demand for museum education and significantly expanded the responsibilities of educators, public cultural institutions continue to face chronic underfunding, staff shortages, pressures related to digitalization, and other structural challenges. As a result, museum educators work under conditions marked by multiple tensions, including limited financial resources, multitasking, work with diverse audiences, and the need to continuously negotiate their professional role and status within museum structures.

Adopting a bottom-up perspective, this presentation centers on educators’ experiences. It addresses four research questions:

1. What does the everyday work of museum educators look like?
2. What do they perceive as opportunities and barriers in their work?
3. What tensions characterize their work?
4. How do museum educators perceive their role within museums and negotiate their position within institutional structures?

The presentation draws on nationwide research conducted in museum institutions across Poland, comprising three stages: (1) a quantitative survey of museum staff (2024), (2) qualitative focus group interviews (FGI) with museum educators in large urban centers with extensive cultural infrastructure (2025), and (3) ongoing qualitative research (FGI and IDI) in medium-sized and small cities with less developed cultural networks (2026).

G-XIV: Changing Work in Public and Cultural Institutions

23 October 2026 | 09.00–10.15 | Room C-140

Chair: Krzysztof Gorlach (Jagiellonian University in Krakow)

Daria Skjoldager-Nielsen (Stockholm University, University of Lodz); **Aneta Głowacka** (University of Silesia):

Theatre as an Empathetic Institution? When Management Meets Emotions

In management studies, increasing attention is being paid to empathetic leadership, which is built on four pillars: empathy, compassion, emotional intelligence, and flexibility. This model of management involves recognizing and responding to employees’ emotions, as well as identifying and regulating one’s own emotional states. It also requires adapting to different communication and working styles, understanding the perspectives of subordinates, valuing their opinions, and incorporating their insights into decision-making (Knock et al., 2019).

Our presentation explores empathy in the relationships between theatre directors and employees, drawing on interdisciplinary research in management studies as well as observations of the specific nature of theatre work. Due to the emotional and creative character of the theatrical environment, empathy becomes not only desirable but a crucial tool for building effective professional relationships.

In management practice, empathy can function as a mediator (Bryson et al., 2013), helping to reduce cognitive barriers between leadership and teams (Bretter et al., 2023). It also supports employees’ individual needs, which can lead to improved organizational outcomes (Rahman et al., 2022). However, within the theatre context - particularly in socially engaged initiatives (Artha et al., 2020) - a traditional understanding of empathy as simply “putting oneself in another’s shoes” may be insufficient. Increasingly important is the concept of recognition, understood as partnership-based collaboration and the acceptance of differences (Hepplewhite, 2022). This perspective encourages more egalitarian and participatory forms of cooperation within institutions.

In our talk, we focus on employees’ expectations toward theatre directors, based on interviews conducted with representatives of different theatre departments. The findings suggest that employees wish to be seen and understood as individuals with their own experiences, knowledge, and perspectives, rather than merely as components of an organizational structure. We argue that the need for recognition and subjectivity plays a crucial role in shaping relationships between staff and leadership. Recognizing employees as partners in dialogue can contribute to building a more open, respectful, and democratic working environment within theatre institutions.

Renata Putkowska-Smoter (University of Warsaw):

Working in the Urban Public Sector: Navigating the Roles of Civil Servant, Service Provider, and Facilitator of Environmental Change

The contemporary public sector is undergoing dynamic transformation in response to shifting societal expectations regarding its operations and evolving employment relations. Drawing on 40 interviews with individuals working in the municipal environmental sector across Poland, this paper examines how these transformations are experienced from within public institutions. The analysis focuses on tensions arising from multiple professional roles, as well as on changes in the nature of work and professional practices. Particular attention is given to the trend of projectification, alongside the anticipated role of the public sector in facilitating societal responses to the challenges posed by the climate crisis. This internal perspective highlights the strategic importance of operating at the boundaries of the public sector as a means of organizational adaptation. Drawing on Niklas Luhmann’s theory of autopoietic social systems and research on self-referential tendencies in public administration, the paper argues that such boundary work enables institutions to respond to external expectations while maintaining coherent and functional internal structures.

G-XV: Boundaries of Work, Boundaries of Power: Gendered & Embodied Perspectives on the Work of Academic Women

23 October 2026 | 09.00–10.15 | Room T-301

Chairs: Dagmara Tarasiuk (University of Lodz); Hanna Krocak (University of Lodz)

Anna Waligóra (Poznań University of Economics and Business):

Women and Trade Unions. The Order-Creating Role of Union Women in (Co-) Creating the Academy

Women dominate the Polish academic environment, comprising approximately 65% of the teaching and research staff at public economic universities. Despite their numerical majority, their contribution to shaping the academic order—a system of norms and relations regulating the university—remains understudied, particularly in the context of trade union activity. The article analyzes the order-creating role of women who are trade union members ("union women") in co-creating the academy.

The literature review reveals a research gap: European studies emphasize women's proactivity in unions (pay equity, work-life balance), while Polish analyses focus on female dominance in lower career levels.

In the research was used a mixed methodology approach: analysis of secondary data and in-depth individual interviews with union women from economic universities in Poland. The interview scenario covered: self-assessment of role, differences with non-unionized women, and vision of reforms. Purposive sampling ensured diversity in seniority and position.

Aleksandra Różalska (University of Lodz):

Mainstreaming Women’s Experiences in Academia: The Intersectional Gender Equality Plan at UniLodz

Drawing from recent studies on gender equality and diversity in academia (e.g., Paoletti, Matias, Różalska 2025), in this presentation I elaborate, on the example of UniLodz, on the boundaries in building a more inclusive and supportive environment for women in HEIs and in implementing timely and comprehensive improvements in institutional culture. Undoubtedly, the Gender Equality Plan, which is a strategic document enlisting tasks to achieve gender equality in many European universities, offers a possibility to introduce significant changes in academia through gender mainstreaming, the DEI perspective, raising awareness, monitoring data and developing tailor-made solutions.

The two consecutive UniLodz’s GEPs adopted an intersectional approach to gender (in)equalities in almost all planned activities and tasks (e.g., training, WLB initiatives, gender-inclusive language, educational campaigns). In this way, they inscribe into what Matias et al. call “the new generation of GEPs” (2025). The second GEP at UniLodz promises “an application of the intersectional approach in dealing with gender-based discrimination (e.g., including age, sexual/gender identity, race, ethnicity, nationality, religious denomination, disability and other special needs, economic status, scientific discipline, career stage, marital/family status, etc.)”. Interrelationships between intersectionality and gender, and looking at various, multilayered processes of discrimination and exclusion through intersectional lenses have been studied since 1980s. However, there are still some challenges in applying intersectional gender perspectives in academia (Kapilashrami 2021, Shelton et al. 2018, Chellappa 2023) as well as in preventing, eliminating and holding responsible for such issues as gender-based violence, mobbing, ageism, sexism and sexual harassment in everyday academic practice.

G-XV: Boundaries of Work, Boundaries of Power: Gendered & Embodied Perspectives on the Work of Academic Women

23 October 2026 | 09.00–10.15 | Room T-301

Chairs: Dagmara Tarasiuk (University of Lodz); Hanna Krocak (University of Lodz)

Helena Marzec-Gołąb (University of Warsaw); **Wiktoria Morawska** (Polish Academy of Sciences); **Sabina Wojtysiak** (University of Wrocław):

Academic Incest, Star Professors and Whisper Networks: A Proposed Framework for Analysing Gender-Based Violence in Academia

The paper proposes a conceptual framework for analyzing gender-based violence in academia, with a particular focus on mechanisms of power, institutional silence, and practices of resistance. The paper is divided into two sections, which constitute a collection of useful terms on the subject of: (I) power relations in academia, including key institutional actors (Star Professors, Watchwomen, Apprentices, Gatekeepers) and mechanisms of academic hierarchy reproduction (social stratification of science, academic incest, clientelism, academic extractivism, cult-like loyalty, silencing, grooming, drawbridges) and (II.2) knowledge and forms of resistance (autoethnography and strange accounts, whisper networks, hidden transcripts). The aim of the paper is both to conceptualise phenomena that have so far functioned in informal narratives, and to create an analytical tool for further empirical research and actions for equality and safety in academia.

G-XVI: Digital and Green Transition, Social Dialogue, and Labour Market. Perspectives from the EU Countries and Beyond (part 1)

23 October 2026 | 09.00–10.15 | Room T-401

Chairs: Veronica Collins (Critical Labour Studies Collective); Paul Stewart (KU Leuven)

Monika Martišková (Central European Labour Studies Institute):

Eroding Cost Advantage and the EV Transition: Workers’ strategies to survive in an Automotive Assembly Site in the Integrated Periphery

The integration of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) into European automotive production has historically been driven by the relocation of capital in search of lower labour costs and favourable investment regimes. This cost-based integration was widely assumed to stabilise employment in peripheral production locations even during periods of industrial restructuring. However, since the early 2020s, rising labour and energy costs, combined with intensifying global competition and the transition towards electric vehicle (EV) production, have begun to erode the comparative advantages that underpinned this model of industrial development. These shifts raise important questions about the future of assembly sites in integrated peripheries and the prospects of workers employed within them.

This paper examines the consequences of these transformations through a case study of the Stellantis production site in Trnava, Slovakia. The plant has experienced increasing pressure linked to the phase-out of internal combustion engine (ICE) production, frequent shifts in corporate strategy, and intensified internal competition across the firm’s European and Mediterranean production network. In recent years, the Trnava site has lost allocations of new model production to plants in Spain and Morocco while simultaneously adapting to flexible multi-platform production involving ICE, hybrid, and electric vehicles. These dynamics have deepened competitive pressures on labour, affecting bargaining power, employment stability, and working conditions.

Empirically, the analysis is based on semi-structured interviews with labour representatives, management actors, and national-level sectoral stakeholders. The study explores how different actors interpret and respond to the challenges of technological transition, corporate restructuring, and changing cost structures. It also examines the role of public subsidies and the development of innovation ecosystems as potential determinants of future product allocation decisions within multinational automotive firms.

Conceptually, the paper engages with debates on production upgrading and its presumed relationship to social upgrading in global production networks. While the transition to EV production is frequently framed as a pathway to industrial renewal and higher value-added activities, the findings suggest that technological upgrading does not automatically translate into improved labour outcomes in peripheral assembly locations. Instead, the persistence of cost-based competition, limited local value creation, and heightened intra-firm rivalry may reinforce existing patterns of social downgrading. In this context, product upgrading associated with electrification risks coexisting with continued pressures to reduce labour costs and maintain flexibility.

The paper argues that the evolving political economy of automotive transition in CEE highlights the fragility of cost-dependent development models and calls into question assumptions about the developmental benefits of technological upgrading. By focusing on

workers’ prospects within a transforming industrial landscape, the study contributes to broader discussions on uneven development, industrial policy, and the future of labour in the context of green industrial transitions.

Pablo Sanz de Miguel, David Pac, José David Moral-Martín (University of Zaragoza):

Trade union’s ideas and strategies towards the transition to electric vehicles (EVs) at plant level in Spain

The shift from internal combustion engine vehicles (ICEVs) to electric vehicles (EVs) marks a critical moment in the automotive industry. The transition exacerbates previous profitability company strategies based on standardisation and cost reduction, with negative implications in terms of working conditions (López Calle et al., 2024). Moreover, it introduces new changes in the supply chains which may increase vulnerability of the European sector in relation to other regions such as China (Díaz, 2024). At the same time, governments are adopting more interventionist roles, as it has been particularly visible in countries such as Spain, where new industry policies have been designed to support the development and manufacture of electric and grid-connected vehicles. This paper aims to analyse trade union’s ideas and strategies towards the transition through a case study focused on a Stellantis plant located in Zaragoza (Spain). In this plant, the 100% electric models arrived in 2019 with the manufacture of the Opel Corsa, and two years later, the plant opened its own battery assembly workshop. The plant currently manufactures the Opel Corsa-e, the Peugeot e-208 and the electric Lancia Ypsilon. In addition, the factory is preparing to produce new models based on the STLA Small platform (see below on this) and the electric SUV from Leapmotor (a Chinese brand) at the end of 2026. In 2025, the plant manufactured 372,481 models, of which 50,855 were 100% electric, from different brands. In this context, the paper examines continuities and ruptures with earlier strategies carried out by the trade union organisation which are present in the plant and have different ideologies and identities; radical unionism (CGT, LAB), integrative unionism (UGT, CCOO), business unionism (ACUMAGME, STOPEL).

G-XVI: Digital and Green Transition, Social Dialogue, and Labour Market. Perspectives from the EU Countries and Beyond (part 1)

23 October 2026 | 09.00–10.15 | Room T-401

Chairs: Veronica Collins (Critical Labour Studies Collective); Paul Stewart (KU Leuven)

Szymon Pilch, Adam Mrozowicki (University of Wrocław); **Jacek Burski** (University of Wrocław); **Olga Gitkiewicz** (University of Wrocław):

Social dialogue dynamics and worker-employer bargaining tactics over twin transition in the automotive sector. The case of Stellantis Poland

The paper presents findings on the union-employers’ negotiations tactics in the case of the transition from internal combustion engine (ICE) vehicles to electric vehicles (EV) at two Stellantis Poland plants: in Tychy (formerly Fiat/FCA) and in Gliwice (formerly Opel/GM). This change is understood to be part of the twin transition process in Europe’s automotive sector, reflecting shifts in EU climate policies and the adoption of robotisation and automation. The digital and green disruptions have exacerbated the crisis in Polish car production, which is characterised by continuous employment decline in the sector and losing out on foreign direct investment to countries with comparable or lower labour costs, as well as greater state subsidies for private businesses in the sector. The paper draws on expert interviews with social partners, and secondary data analysis.

The Tychy plant, dating back to the 1970s, produces hybrid and electric passenger cars (PC) and employs 2,378 people. It is home to five active unions and has a long history of conflict between labour and management dating back to the time of Fiat and FCA. Founded as a greenfield PC assembly plant by Opel/GM in 1998, the Gliwice plant was purchased by PSA in the late 2010s and transformed into a (ICE and EV) van producer, with the current employment of 2,000 people. The Solidarity union dominates in the factory, and although there are tensions, the relationships with the management are more cooperative. Both plants became part of the Stellantis group in 2021, which accelerated their shift towards EV production. The management cited limited demand for EV as the reason for job cuts in both factories (1200 people in total since 2024).

The research documents the overall prevalence of a distributive (“win-lose”) over integrative (“win-win”) bargaining (Garaudel, 2008) in both plants, with the former being stronger in the Tychy as compared to the Gliwice. It is argued that distributive bargaining in Tychy reflects path dependency in company-level industrial relations, greater union rivalry and a more hierarchical management style within Fiat/FCA compared to Opel/GM. Despite these differences, collective negotiations at both plants focus mostly on wages and employment and the role of social dialogue in managing the twin transition is limited. The most key decisions - e.g., relating to layoffs and retraining - being made unilaterally by the employer. On the one hand, this reflects the limited role of dialogue within Stellantis at a transnational level; on the other, it points to national factors, such as very limited sectoral level social dialogue due to employers’ disinterest in it and limited role of tripartism in shaping state industrial policies in the sector. The strongly critical stance of Polish unions – particularly Solidarity – towards EU climate policies further shifts the focus of dispute from individual companies to the political decisions of the EU and the Polish government.

Overall, the paper demonstrates how the interplay of institutional, structural, and ideological factors undermines the role of social dialogue in managing the twin transition disruptions, both within Stellantis and across the Polish automotive sector.

Louis Lines, Marco Hauptmeier (Cardiff University):

Contested transition - social dialogue in the automotive sector at Stellantis UK

The transition to electric vehicles (EVs) is frequently presented as a coordinated industrial transformation requiring close alignment between firms, workers and governments. However, the shift to EVs is unfolding under contested conditions with significant adoption uncertainty, raising new challenges for established systems of social dialogue. This paper examines how worker representation and industrial relations structures respond when a regulatory commitment to electrification is accompanied by persistently low production volumes, threatening jobs. Empirically, the paper focuses on the restructuring of the UK operations of Stellantis, analysing the consolidation of vehicle production at the Ellesmere Port plant following the closure of the Luton plant. The restructuring was framed as a flagship investment in electrification, centred on the establishment of an EV-only production line. However, sales volumes for the vehicles produced at the site remain substantially below capacity, creating an emerging “volume crisis” that has placed employment stability and future production allocations at the centre of workplace politics, causing significant workforce anxiety and the mobilisation of social dialogue structures. The case reveals a contested transition in which the strategic direction of electrification is formally accepted but actively negotiated in practice. At the plant level, shop stewards and workforce representatives have mobilised internally, including campaigning for the potential reintroduction of an internal combustion engine (ICE) line to stabilise production volumes. At the same time, unions have activated national and sectoral risk committees in an effort to secure additional allocations and safeguard employment. Simultaneously, the UK government has initiated an investment strategy designed to support UK production and lock-in manufacturing in the UK. These dynamics unfold within the broader reconfiguration of Stellantis’ global EV strategy, including a shift toward platform-based production models and new partnerships with Chinese manufacturers. The paper argues that uncertain demand conditions are stretching social dialogue structures offering only limited potential to affect management decision making in the context of the green transition. By analysing these dynamics, the paper contributes to comparative European debates on the industrial relations of the green transition in the automotive sector.

G-XVII: Emotions in Organisations and Professional Work

23 October 2026 | 10.30–11.45 | Room C-101

Chair: Beata Pawłowska (University of Lodz)

Dominika Byczkowska-Owczarek (University of Lodz):

Emotional expression in work of Polish Sign Language interpreters

In the presentation, I will examine the role of emotional expression as a tool employed in the work of Polish Sign Language (PSL) interpreters. I draw on the findings of a two-year qualitative sociological study focused on embodied practices within this profession. The paper will characterise PSL interpreting as the transmission of content between representatives (individuals or groups) of two language-based cultures. This work is enacted through the body, and emotional expression constitutes one of the interpreter’s principal instruments, functioning also as an element of PSL grammar and punctuation. I will illustrate the diverse contexts in which interpreting is performed, ranging from psychotherapy sessions and news broadcasts to theatrical interpretation. I will, as well, address the “private” emotions that interpreters experience in the course of their work. Finally, the presentation will consider the professional ethical principles emerging within this occupational community in the context of its ongoing professionalisation.

Łukasz Marciniak (University of Lodz):

Lightworking, Bliss and Flow. The Concept of Work in the Altered Perceptions of the Society

This paper examines how the meaning of work is redefined in milieus whose members use altered states of consciousness to question, suspend, and reconstruct dominant social assumptions. Focusing on actors who describe themselves as lightworkers, I ask how work is symbolically distinguished from non-work in communities where emotional attunement, energetic alignment, bliss, flow, and service to others become central criteria for recognizing an activity as meaningful labor. In doing so, the paper addresses the conference’s broader concern with shifting boundaries of work and contributes specifically to the thematic discussion on the emotional boundaries of professional life.

My central argument is that these environments produce an alternative moral and emotional economy of work. In the narratives and practices of lightworkers, work is not defined primarily by formal employment, contractual obligation, income, or organizational position. Instead, it is understood through affective intensity, authenticity, healing potential, relational resonance, and the ability to generate states of flow, inner coherence, and collective uplift. Conversely, activities that are institutionally recognized as work may be symbolically rejected as “dead labor,” “misaligned effort,” or emotionally alienated performance if they are experienced as draining, spiritually empty, or detached from care and connection. What counts as work is therefore reclassified not only through economic or organizational criteria, but through emotional, ethical, and experiential ones.

The paper draws on socionautics, a qualitative and interpretive perspective for analyzing how altered perceptions of society reshape understandings of social order, norms, and relationships. Methodologically, it is grounded in meaning-centered analysis of narratives, self-descriptions, and symbolic practices found in communities that use altered states of consciousness as resources for rethinking the self, social ties, and collective life. Rather than treating such experiences as merely private or psychological, I approach them as socially productive frameworks through which actors redefine labor, vocation, usefulness, care, and contribution.

By analyzing lightworking as a boundary concept, the paper shows how emotions become classificatory tools in drawing the line between work and non-work. It thus contributes to current debates on emotional labor by shifting attention from organizationally managed emotions to emotionally legitimated forms of work recognition. More broadly, it demonstrates that altered perceptions of society may reveal emerging post-conventional understandings of work in which bliss, flow, and relational energy are not marginal feelings attached to labor, but key principles through which labor itself is named, valued, and organized.

G-XVII: Emotions in Organisations and Professional Work

23 October 2026 | 10.30–11.45 | Room C-101

Chair: Beata Pawłowska (University of Lodz)

Aleksandra Pirek (University of Lodz):

On the Commodification of Feelings and Emotional Capitalism in Digital Space and Social Media

This thesis addresses the issue of emotional commodification in social media, analyzing and interpreting the techniques by which digital platforms can transform human emotions into a measurable and capitalizable resource. The study was conducted using focus group interviews (FGIs) with twenty participants, divided into two groups: young adults and adults over 40. The aim of the interviews was to qualitatively explore the relationship between users' emotional perception of content and the logic of social media. The work is rooted in the assumptions of interpretive sociology and the theoretical frameworks of symbolic interactionism, the sociology of emotions, and media studies. The project was heavily inspired by the grounded theory methodology. Analysis of the collected empirical material confirmed the proposed research theses, which inspect the relationship between affective states, their valence and intensity, and the level of engagement in consumption, as well as the loss of emotional reflexivity that accompanies susceptibility to sensory overload from virtual stimuli. A key finding was the paradox of an inability to change habits, revealed despite declared awareness of the impact of algorithmization and platform capitalism. The study also highlighted the growing phenomenon of compulsive content consumption, referred to as inforography, and a blurring line between online and offline life. The results provide a starting point for further, broader research on the commodification of emotions in the context of the increasing digitization of social life and the expansion of generative artificial intelligence in media and virtual space.

Patrycja Kowacka (University of Lodz):

Emotion management in crisis situations among residential childcare workers

This paper analyzes the emotional dimension of care work in residential care homes (orphanages) in Łódź, focusing strictly on how educators manage their emotions during professional crises. In the highly unpredictable environment of a care home, emergency situations- such as physical aggression, emotional outbursts, or severe behavioral issues among children- serve as critical turning points that test both the psychological resistance and the professionalism of the staff.

Drawing upon Erving Goffman's dramaturgical approach and Arlie Russell Hochschild's theory of emotional labor, this qualitative research reconstructs the experiences of six educators through semi-structured interviews. The findings reveal that when a crisis occurs, educators view the children as a strict "audience" observing their every move. To prevent panic from escalating and to maintain institutional order, staff members actively suppress their primary physiological reactions, such as fear or helplessness. This process manifests through two main mechanisms: mobilizing stress (a cognitive strategy where internal tension is immediately transformed into task-oriented problem-solving) and emotional freezing (a form of surface acting where an educator puts on an invisible mask of absolute calm, predictability, and stability).

While maintaining a controlled professional "front stage" is essential for the children's safety and the educator's authority, the research highlights that long-term emotional freezing bears a significant psychological toll. Because educators have limited access to institutional "backstages" they must rely on post-work recovery methods- such as intense physical activity ("burning off emotions in muscles") or horizontal team solidarity based on mutual trust- to prevent professional burnout and secondary traumatization. Ultimately, the study concludes that successful crisis management requires the development of "engaged neutrality," allowing educators to control the interactive space without absorbing the trauma as their own.

G-XVIII: Superdiversity, Disability, Mental Health and Inclusion in the Social Worlds of Work

23 October 2026 | 10.30–11.45 | Room C-140

Chair: Joanna Sztobryn-Giercuskiewicz (University of Lodz)

Zbigniew Głąb, Jakub Niedbalski, Hanna Krocak (University of Lodz):

Individual boundaries or social barriers? Vocational Education, Social Expectations, and the Careers of Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities

The presentation outlines the findings of a qualitative study focusing on the educational and occupational trajectories of individuals with intellectual disabilities, as well as the social construction of the meaning of work within their life stories. The analysis followed the principles of grounded theory and was based on interviews conducted with people with intellectual disabilities, their parents, and representatives of institutions providing support.

The key axial categories identified in the analysis include: experiences within both mainstream and special education systems, vocational education misaligned with individual abilities and needs, employment as a discontinuous and episodic experience, and the socially constructed meaning attributed to work. Integrating these categories enabled the identification of a central category described as the “vicious circle of perceptions of work among people with intellectual disabilities.” This concept refers to a process in which low societal expectations, segregated educational pathways, inadequate vocational preparation, and unstable employment experiences mutually reinforce one another, ultimately fostering the internalisation of the belief that stable employment is unattainable.

The findings suggest that vocational education frequently fulfils primarily protective and socialising roles rather than serving as a mechanism of empowerment or emancipation, which contributes to the absence of stable and continuous career trajectories. Although respondents associate work with adulthood and social normality, it is simultaneously perceived as a distant and optional element of life, not necessarily required for independence. Overprotective parental attitudes and the predominance of the medical model of disability also play a significant role in shaping these perceptions.

The analysis also highlights the potential of the social model of disability as a framework for disrupting the identified vicious circle, particularly through early socialisation into work, raising expectations regarding employment, and the individualisation of educational and career pathways.

Weronika Ludek (Adam Mickiewicz University Poznań):

The double-edged sword of academia: the experience of autistic women in higher education

Research shows that the experiences of neurodivergent people, including autistic people, in higher education are shaped by pervasive barriers and everyday challenges, affecting both students and academic staff. Despite institutional rhetoric promoting openness and diversity, universities often perpetuate ableist norms that privilege neurotypical styles of scholarly performance, productivity, and professionalism. Academia is often described as a “double-edged sword”: on the one hand, it can enable deep engagement with special interests and foster development; on the other hand, it can create conditions that undermine well-being through overload, misfit, and chronic strain.

The project “Autistic women in academia” examines women’s academic work through the lens of the neurodiversity paradigm, focusing on the lived experiences of neurodivergent women (autistic and AuDHD) employed at Polish universities. We study how the market-oriented model of the “neoliberal university” co-produces workplace barriers, privileges particular styles of being and working as a scholar, and intensifies mechanisms of exclusion, especially at the intersection of gender and neurodivergence.

The presentation draws on a qualitative design consisting of 30 in-depth interviews with autistic women academics at different career stages (doctoral, early-, mid-, and late-career), across disciplines and institutions. The project is conducted by neurodivergent researchers, aligning with the principles of autistic-led research and neuroinclusion in social research.

During the presentation, we will discuss the barriers and challenges that university workplaces pose for neurominorities, as well as factors that can make academic work enabling and sustainable. We will analyse coping and adjustment strategies developed by used by neurodivergent scholars in higher education - ranging from self-advocacy and disclosure management to everyday practices for navigating sensory, communication, and organisational demands. Finally, we will outline multi-level recommendations from team-based micro-practices to institutional interventions aimed at fostering equality, accessibility, and the quality of work in higher education.

G-XVIII: Superdiversity, Disability, Mental Health and Inclusion in the Social Worlds of Work

23 October 2026 | 10.30–11.45 | Room C-140

Chair: Joanna Sztobryn-Giercuskiewicz (University of Lodz)

Dorota Żuchowska-Skiba (AGH University of Krakow):

Assistive Technologies as a Tool for Inclusion in Diverse Workplaces

Contemporary workplaces are increasingly diverse in terms of work styles, experiences, and digital competencies, creating both opportunities and challenges for employees with disabilities. In these environments, assistive technologies play a central role, enabling participation, skill development, and full integration into complex teams. This article examines how these technologies shape work practices, redefine competence, and support inclusion in modern organizational contexts.

The study is based on 30 in-depth interviews with highly educated employees with disabilities, all of whom work in hybrid, remote, or digitally mediated environments where technology is central to daily tasks. The interviews explored how a range of tools—including speech-to-text software, AI-based communication systems, adaptive interfaces, digital accessibility platforms, and remote collaboration systems—support task performance, facilitate access to information, and enable active engagement in professional teams.

Findings reveal that assistive technologies function far beyond simple compensation for physical or cognitive limitations. They serve as instruments for managing visibility, negotiating roles, and establishing professional positions within organizations, while simultaneously reshaping expectations of competence and productivity. These tools allow employees with disabilities to fully engage in complex work processes, take on challenging tasks, and participate on an equal footing with colleagues, representing a crucial component of practical inclusion.

At the same time, assistive technologies introduce new expectations and hierarchies based on digital literacy, adaptability, and the ability to align with organizational norms. While formal inclusion policies promote accessibility, their effective implementation often depends on employees’ capacity to use these tools effectively and to advocate for their own needs and work conditions. In this way, assistive technologies not only enhance autonomy and access to employment but also actively shape the criteria by which competence and professionalism are recognized.

The study demonstrates that in digitally mediated and diverse work environments, assistive technologies are essential for active participation, professional engagement, and career positioning. They support inclusion by redefining boundaries of belonging, influencing the social organization of work, and establishing new standards for competence and inclusive practices. By situating assistive technologies at the center of work processes, the article highlights how innovation can transform not only access to employment but also the very frameworks through which employees with disabilities are perceived as capable, productive, and professional.

Ultimately, this research underscores that technologies as tools of inclusion are not merely supportive devices, but active agents in shaping how competence, participation, and belonging are negotiated in contemporary, diverse workplaces. They enable employees with disabilities

to navigate complex organizational environments, assert their professional value, and contribute meaningfully to team performance, demonstrating the transformative potential of assistive technologies in modern labor markets.

Agata Krasowska, Aneta Uss-Lik (University of Wrocław):

Barriers to Disability for People Experiencing Mental Health Crises in the Open Labour Market

The proposal addresses the problem of disability-related barriers experienced by individuals undergoing severe mental health crises in the context of functioning in the open labour market. Despite formal guarantees of equal treatment, including those resulting from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, people with experience of severe mental health crises continue to face structural exclusion from the open labour market. Particular attention is paid to the phenomenon of diagnosis concealment strategies, which influence career trajectories and employment stability. The findings highlight the need to implement solutions based on the supported employment model, to develop inclusive policies within organizations, and to strengthen employers’ competencies in the field of mental health. Addressing these barriers requires systemic actions that combine legal, organizational, and educational interventions aimed at building work environments conducive to recovery and full social participation.

The analysis focuses on identifying both individual barriers (reduced stress resilience, cognitive difficulties, and illness-related symptoms) and institutional barriers (lack of flexible organizational arrangements and inadequate recruitment procedures). The analysis is based on secondary data derived from national statistical sources, including the Polish Labour Force Survey (BAEL), data from the State Fund for the Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities (PFRON), and other available public statistical datasets.

The presentation constitutes part of a proposal currently being prepared for the Horizon Europe programme concerning inclusive employment support models for people with experience of mental health crises. It also includes conclusions from Agata Krasowska’s forthcoming book, entitled Work (does not) heal. Biographical narratives of people experiencing mental health crises.

G-XIX: The Transformation of Creative Work: AI, Platformisation, Precarisation and Workers' Experiences

23 October 2026 | 10.30–11.45 | Room T-301

Chair: Piotr Binder (Polish Academy of Sciences)

Katarzyna Gdesz (University of Warsaw):

Blurring Labour Boundaries in Journalism. Precarisation, AI and Worker Resistance in the Polish Media Sector

This presentation examines the growing use of precarious forms of work in the Polish media sector as part of broader transformations that blur the social and legal boundaries between dependent employment and self-employment. In contemporary media organisations, self-employment formally framed as independent contracting often functions as a form of disguised employment, shifting economic risks and social security responsibilities from employers to individual workers. The analysis is grounded in qualitative empirical research based on semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted with journalists and media workers in Poland. The study explores how workers interpret their employment status and navigate tensions between the formal requirement to run their own business activity and their de facto organisational dependence on media companies. Drawing on labour process theory, the analysis situates these experiences within broader transformations of journalistic work associated with digitalisation, organisational restructuring, and the intensification of productivity demands. Particular attention is given to the growing role of artificial intelligence and other forms of automation in the production of journalistic content. The interview material enables examination of how journalists perceive the increasing use of AI tools in tasks such as research, editing, and text production, and how these technologies reshape everyday labour processes in knowledge-intensive work. The empirical analysis also explores how workers respond to these transformations. It examines emerging strategies through which journalists attempt to cope with the pressures of precarious employment and the growing automation of cognitive labour, including efforts to maintain professional autonomy, distance themselves from routinised content production, and redefine the boundaries of journalistic expertise. Finally, the presentation discusses the possibilities and limitations of collective representation among media workers, analysing how trade unions attempt to organise workers whose legal status places them at the ambiguous boundary between employment and self-employment. By combining empirical research with labour process theory and debates on the automation of cognitive labour, the presentation contributes to broader discussions on precarisation, technological change, and the transformation of professional work in contemporary media industries.

G-XIX: The Transformation of Creative Work: AI, Platformisation, Precarisation and Workers’ Experiences

23 October 2026 | 10.30–11.45 | Room T-301

Chair: Piotr Binder (Polish Academy of Sciences)

Paula González León (Complutense University of Madrid):

Between dreams and nightmares: Impacts of platformisation on the experience and career path of workers in the film industry

This proposal is based on the question of the place of dreams or longings in the processes of subjectivation of creative workers, understanding these as a product of an individual construction process (aspirations or personal desires), which in turn are affected, influenced or shaped by the socio-historical reality in which the subject is inscribed.

The analytical exercise of the proposal benefits from the plurality of terms that can be linked to the semantic field of dreams and desires, which mobilize people in the definition and construction of their own work trajectories. Thus, the role of desire that moves individuals to achieve their aspirations is highlighted (Lordon, 2015; Illouz, 2019). Dreams or longings constitute a gateway to workers' subjectivation processes, following Dejours (2023) when it refers, for example, the value of the dreams –understood in a dreamlike sense– of workers to understand the effects of capitalism on people’s processes of subjectivation.

This communication falls under thematic group 1 on "AI, Transformation of Cognitive Labor, and White-Collar Work Crisis", with the aim to present a progress of the results of a qualitative research, in which 20 workers from the field of film production and post-production have been interviewed, specifically scriptwriters and visual effects artists.

The preliminary results show a strong relationship with the technological transformations that have affected their work. On the one hand, there is the impact of platforms that has resulted in an increase in production and, therefore, greater employment opportunities in a sector marked by the intermittency of work. In turn, AI identifies itself as a major threat, both in terms of job destruction and possible precariousness.

On the other hand, the aesthetic dimension of the relationship emerges, the pathos that pushes and provokes its activity. This affection produces both pleasant and painful affections, often amalgamated and pursued by the pleasure (Lacan, 2002) it generates in the subjects, which shows us the paradox of pursuing precisely what can generate suffering, in this case, the work that is performed.

Finally, the role of hope in sustaining a constructed career path is highlighted (Hope Labour, Kuehn & Corrigan, 2013), in the effort to endure the poor conditions in which many of them find themselves, projecting or shifting towards the future the longing for fulfillment of their desires (Zafra, 2017). This promise that is projected into the imagination allows us to identify the role of longings, the perversion of the molded bond and the mixture of affections that complexify the relationship that appears as a cruel optimism, as described by Laurent Berlant (2011).

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Wiktor Sokół (University of Gdańsk):

Does Human Creativity Still Matter? Algorithms and the Transformation of Creative Work

The rapid development of tools based on generative artificial intelligence, initiated by the release of ChatGPT-3 at the end of 2022, has significantly changed the situation in many industries. One of the sectors affected by these changes is the so-called creative industry. These new tools have considerably accelerated creative processes, allowing text, graphics, or videos to be generated from a single prompt. While such technologies may facilitate and potentially democratize creative work, they have also produced a number of negative consequences from the perspective of workers. As Demirci et al. (2024) show, following the introduction of these tools, one of the major online work platforms experienced a significant decline in orders for creative workers in professions considered susceptible to automation, such as graphic designers and copywriters. As Judy Wajcman (2017) argues, a key problem of contemporary technological development is that it is primarily oriented toward profit and the needs of a relatively narrow and homogeneous group of actors from Silicon Valley, rather than toward humanity more broadly.

In my presentation, I examine how these developments are perceived by creative industry workers themselves. The analysis draws on eight interviews conducted with creative professionals, in which I asked about their experiences with technology in the workplace, particularly tools based on generative artificial intelligence. The analysis is framed using Labor Process Theory, and the study addresses three main questions: to what extent artificial intelligence has already changed the nature of creative work, how these changes are perceived by workers themselves, and whether they consider it possible that artificial intelligence may enable the full automation of their professions in the future.

G-XIX: The Transformation of Creative Work: AI, Platformisation, Precarisation and Workers' Experiences

23 October 2026 | 10.30–11.45 | Room T-301

Chair: Piotr Binder (Polish Academy of Sciences)

Aleksandra Drążczyk, Joanna Wygnańska (University of Lodz):

Between the experience of suffering and making sense of overwhelming everyday life in the work of internet content creators

The proposed paper will be based on data from the research project Post-transformation in the Perspective of Biographical Experiences of People Born between 1980–2005. A Sociological Analysis (NCN OPUS-21, UMO-2021/41/B/HS6/02048, project leader: Kaja Kaźmierska), which has been conducted since January 2022 at the Department of Sociology of Culture at the University of Lodz. The project aims to analyse the biographical experiences of informants in order to capture the mutual influence between the individual perspective (the narrators' biographical experiences) and macro-social and cultural processes (also reflected in media discourse) characteristic of the period referred to in the study as post-transformation.

In our presentation, we will examine the cases of several internet content creators who cope with various dimensions of suffering. The concept of the trajectory of suffering, developed by Fritz Schütze and Gerhard Riemann, serves as an important analytical framework for our analysis. Our goal is to highlight the multiple layers of connection among the online workspace, content creation, the maintenance of a precarious balance in everyday life, and the process of making sense of individual experiences. Drawing on autobiographical accounts, we will show how internet content creation helps narrators cope with fragile mental health, as well as the chaos and disorder of their everyday lives. The Internet, and social media in particular, due to certain characteristics—such as extensive freedom in choosing the themes of one's creative work and the ability to go beyond one's immediate interactional environment—often help individuals regain a sense of control over their own lives. In some cases, the narrators work through the sense of loss that accompanies their everyday lives by building their own creative projects on social media. Interactions with the online audience also play an important role: on the one hand, this audience becomes a significant resource for creators and functions as their “significant other”; on the other hand, its activity may sometimes lead to a loss of control over one's self-presentation and to an intensification of feelings of disorder.

G-XX Digital and Green Transition, Social Dialogue, and Labour Market. Perspectives from the EU Countries and Beyond (part 2):

23 October 2026 | 10.30–11.45 | Room T-401

Chair: Jacek Burski (University of Wrocław)

Angelo Moro (University of Modena and Reggio Emilia); **Clelia Li Vigni** (Scuola Normale Superiore):

Permanent restructuring amid the uncertain transition to electric mobility: evidence from Stellantis factories in France and Italy

This paper examines the impact of the transition to electric mobility on working conditions in five Stellantis plants in France and Italy. While public and policy debates on the automotive transition have largely focused on the risk of job losses, the paper argues that equal attention should be paid to the conditions of those workers who remain in production. Drawing on 52 semi-structured interviews conducted between 2024 and 2025 with 103 trade union representatives and officials across five plants, the article analyses how electrification is reshaping labour processes, workforce composition, and workers’ everyday experience inside the factory.

The paper situates these developments within the broader restructuring of the European automotive industry over the last two decades, marked by relocation, premiumisation, decentralisation of industrial relations, and permanent pressures to reduce labour costs. Against this background, it argues that the current transition is unfolding less as a just transition than as a new phase of green restructuring. Rather than representing a rupture with past trajectories, electrification tends to accelerate and intensify pre-existing dynamics of industrial rationalisation.

The empirical analysis identifies three interrelated processes. First, electrification is embedded in intensified strategies of cost cutting, benchmarking, and inter-plant competition, through which management pressures workers and unions to accept higher productivity and flexibility. Second, it is associated with profound transformations in work organisation, including the spread of mixed-model production lines, higher work saturation, greater complexity of tasks, and new digital systems of monitoring and control, all of which contribute to the intensification of labour. Third, it is accompanied by a reconfiguration of the workforce through employment reduction, ageing, precarisation, and differentiated use of temporary labour and short-time work schemes.

The article concludes that, in the cases examined, the green transition is reinforcing rather than alleviating long-standing inequalities and pressures within automotive production. It therefore calls into question institutional narratives of just transition and highlights the need to place working conditions at the centre of analyses of industrial decarbonisation.

Barbara Audycka (University of Warsaw); **Marton Czirfusz** (Periferia Policy and Research Center):

The impact of the twin transition on housing and labour precariousness in urban agglomerations: a scoping review

The twin transition has become a key concept in EU housing-related policies and scholarly research. In this scoping review, we argue that existing scholarship on twin transition processes has under-theorised the interlinkages between housing and labour. This gap limits understanding of how the twin transition affects housing and labour in urban agglomerations. Previous research has shown that precarious worker groups are disproportionately affected by the urban housing crisis. Our review identifies research gaps concerning the mechanisms through which the twin transition may amplify precariousness in housing and labour markets. First, labour market processes associated with the twin transition – such as the platformisation of work, the unequal distribution of remote work, and limited career advancement – heighten low-income workers’ vulnerability to housing affordability pressures in large cities. Second, twin transition processes are likely to affect people living in precarious housing, where potential improvements in housing quality may be offset by reduced affordability, security, and increased spatial polarisation within urban agglomerations. We conclude that housing research needs to conceptualise housing and labour as interconnected domains, a need that is increasingly urgent amid ongoing twin transition processes. We also point to the research avenues that could be explored, such as relation between the need of physical presence at work, availability of transport and housing opportunities. The paper is an outcome of the EqualHouse project: <https://equalhouse.eu/>

G-XX Digital and Green Transition, Social Dialogue, and Labour Market. Perspectives from the EU Countries and Beyond (part 2):

23 October 2026 | 10.30–11.45 | Room T-401

Chair: Jacek Burski (University of Wrocław)

Patrik Gažo (Slovak Academy of Sciences):

Classed Climate Orientations in Slovakia's Green Transition

This paper explores how skilled workers, socio-cultural professionals, and lower- to middle-level managers in Slovakia's automotive, healthcare, and agricultural sectors interpret and respond to the green transition. It centres on classed climate orientations - that is, how positions within the labour market shape understandings of environmental change, perceived risks and opportunities, and expectations toward the state, employers, and unions. Situated in a semi-peripheral, export-dependent EU economy, the analysis combines a reconceptualised upgrading/downgrading framework with just transition scholarship to examine how decarbonisation restructures labour processes, employment security, and skill hierarchies. Rather than assuming a uniform trajectory of green upgrading, the paper discusses how climate policy is refracted through sectoral dynamics, firm-level governance, and the institutional strength of social dialogue. Drawing on qualitative interviews and comparative sectoral analysis, the findings reveal differentiated orientations toward the green transition. Some employees perceive decarbonisation as an opportunity for technological renewal and occupational upgrading, while others associate it with precarity, work intensification, or marginalisation from decision-making processes. These divergences reflect internal stratification within the working class and the mediating role of managerial strata between capital imperatives, (environmental) regulatory demands, and labour concerns. The paper argues that classed climate orientations are not merely attitudinal but structurally grounded in labour market segmentation and access to representation. Strengthening inclusive social dialogue is therefore central to ensuring that Slovakia's green transition mitigates, rather than deepens, existing inequalities.