

CALL FOR PAPERS

## WORK AND ITS VALUE

Interdisciplinary Reflections  
on an Ever-Changing Concept

International Conference



**Bergamo (Italy) | 25-27 November 2021 | XI Edition**  
Palazzo dei Contratti, Via Petrarca 10

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Covid-19 has led us to rethink the approach to work in economic, social and anthropological terms. Over the last three centuries, work and its value have been considered mostly in terms of economic exchange. Work regulation and industrial relations systems are also founded on this view: they draw on well-defined categories – e.g. legal subordination, collective interest, social class, abstract work, and exchange value – which have long constituted the legal, institutional and economic basis for the 'social pact' underpinning Western economies and some dichotomies therein (e.g. public vs. private, state vs. market, local vs. global).

Market exchange and its legal definition still play a major role, as they govern the labour market, ensuring employee protection and remuneration in exchange for work. Yet today it is important to understand whether work can be still seen as a mere exchange relationship between individuals who want to maximise their profit.

The economic and social changes we are called on to appreciate provide a heterogeneous picture, which appears to be a paradox if they are investigated taking into account the categories employed for the well-established social contract.

Most work performed in the context of new capitalism is mutual, cooperative and relational in nature. The circular model is gradually ousting the pyramidal one, with professionalism and skills that are given increasing relevance. As capitalism is reaching its advanced stage, the value of work is prioritised, raising competition in traditional market segments and creating low-paid and unskilled occupations that are usually held by the most vulnerable workers. These workers played a major role during the pandemic, both in economic and social terms. Moreover, workers' motivations and expectations are relevant aspects and go beyond the economic dimension, especially in today's labour market, which is marked by frequent transitions.

The economic dimension and the regulation of the employment relationships involving different parties are still key aspects, but these relationships are not well defined. Labour law, industrial relations, economic models, traditional industrial sociology and anthropological studies are modelled around the twentieth-century concept of a 'worker'. Arguably, those historical categories are no longer suitable to frame ongoing changes, although they are still widely used for investigating today's impact of work. This holds even truer considering the pandemic that has affected our lives over the last year.

It is against this background that ADAPT's 2021 international conference intends to examine the paradoxes of the current labour market, trying to deconstruct them in order to rethink the value of work. Through new legal, economic and sociological categories that go beyond linear and conceptual

juxtapositions, an attempt will be made to bring to the fore the economic and welfare dimension, which appears to be more apt to define today's meaning of work.

Therefore, ADAPT's International School of Higher Education in Labour Law and Industrial Relations invites professors, researchers, graduate students, professionals and those who have an interest in the conference topics to provide their contribution, so as to examine the ever-changing concept of work from an international and comparative perspective. Scholars are welcome to contribute to one or more of the following research tracks.

### Track 1 – In-Work Poverty, Unpaid Work, Care Work and Non-Productive Work. Towards a New Paradigm?

This research track focuses on the value of work, moving beyond the mere economic dimension and considering those jobs that produce little to no economic gain. While taking into account the dichotomy between productive and non-productive work, this track wants to encourage new theoretical and empirical analyses on low-paid, unpaid, care and non-productive work. The focus is unpaid work – which is given scant consideration in the public and academic debate – especially considering the consequences of Covid-19. This will be done in order to understand whether alternative or complementary paradigms exist to the economic one.

### Track 2 – The Dignity of Work between Its Economic and Social Value

Is it true that all jobs have dignity? Or, does this apply only for those jobs having economic value? The aim of this research track is to encourage papers analysing the notion of 'dignity of work'. Rather than contrasting the economic and social value of work, the focus will be on what makes work decent. An attempt will therefore be made to review this theme from a broader perspective, thus considering the anthropological, individual, collective and social dimension. Those forms of employment that are usually given scant consideration in labour market analysis – e.g. care work and volunteering – will also be examined.

### Track 3 – Measuring the (Economic) Value of Work: Job Classification Systems, Fair Wage, Certificates and Remuneration

The traditional theories defining the economic value of work presuppose a sort of objectification of the relationship between work and the goods produced, which is however challenged by the transformations currently underway. This holds true if one considers that the conditions encouraging capitalist production are less relevant. Among them, mention should be made of the existence of working processes, well-known production methods and techniques and the use of time as a tool for measuring performance. Technological innovation, the diversification of production, work performance and the increasing relevance assigned to the cognitive dimension question the validity of classical theories. Consequently, those criteria used to assess the value

of work, *i.e.* work content and people's professional skills, are given increasing momentum. Drawing on research analyses and case studies, this research track wants to look at aspects such as the evolution of remuneration systems, job classification schemes, fair wage for the self-employed, remuneration for special working schemes (e.g. riders) and those systems put in place to make work content and people's professional skills more transparent (e.g. skills certification, licenses, registration).

#### Track 4 – Representing Work and Collective Bargaining in the Light of the Challenges of Individualization and Social and Contractual Dumping

This research track is concerned with theoretical analyses and empirical studies on modern forms of employee representation, protection and collective solidarity, both on the national and the international level. An attempt will be made at investigating new and old organising strategies as well as the functions and the structure of traditional actors and institutions (e.g. trade unions, employers' associations, collective bargaining, employee participation schemes, joint bodies). This research track will emphasise the changes occurred in employee representation, also in relation to employment regulation outside traditional forms of protection (domestic and care work, social cooperation and the third sector, work carried out in 'existential suburbs' and that performed in the context of global value chains). The analysis will also look at the way work can revive people's individual nature. This might be due in part to more unstable working conditions and occupational transitions, and in part to a kind of capitalism promoting one's professionalism, responsibility and autonomy. This holds even truer when considering the widespread use of remote work following Covid-19.

#### Track 5 – The Idea of Work Today and through History. Origins, Developments and Future Prospects

Today's work features a complexity that makes it impossible to examine it from a single perspective. Covid-19 has intensified this complexity, and the meaning of work for us has now become the subject of public and academic debates. In the context of this research track, reflections will concern the nature and sense of work from different standpoints. In this sense, work has been investigated both individually – *i.e.* as a human activity – and collectively, as a fundamental dimension for social development in a given historical period. In order to understand today's nature and sense of work, it is necessary to go back in time and refer to those authors who faced the same questions. However, rather than providing a merely historical reconstruction, consideration will be given to lessons from the past, which might enrich the current debate and suggest new ways to define work.

#### Track 6 – Work and Works: Gender Issues and Differences

Current demographic changes (population ageing, falling birth rates, migration flows) have already started to impact the world of work. This research track focuses on the implications of widespread multiculturalism (e.g. management of employment relationships and new forms of work organisation to adapt to different religious practices,



ethnicities, moral and ethical choices), the new role of women and the protection of their rights. This is particularly the case in relation to the negative impact that Covid-19 has had on female employment (e.g. gender relations outside work, access to employment, equality of treatment as regards pay, anti-discrimination practices, work-life balance, links between productive and care work, promotion of economic independence).

### Track 7 – Man and the Machine: Friends or Foes?

The purpose of this research track is to examine the man-machine relationship in current, technologically-intensive settings (e.g. the Internet of Things, machine learning, big data) in order to understand the value of work in increasingly digitalised production processes. Is human work marginalised to the advantage of algorithms performing routine, manual and intellectual tasks? Or, will human contribution be sought after to perform activities other than those carried out by machines? An attempt will be made to answer these questions, welcoming contributions and case studies examining work environments where technologies resulting from the IV industrial revolution are already in use.

### Track 8 – Work and the Environment: Developments and Objectives of the 'Just Transition' Approach

Work and the environment are regarded as fictitious commodities in capitalist market economies and, as such, they might be mutually conflicting elements. In the twentieth century, most investments to make plants more sustainable brought about lower remuneration and fewer job opportunities. Conversely, heightened job protection has often resulted in lower environmental investments. The worsening of the global environmental crisis has called for the need to promote dialogue between these two policy sectors, in order to strike a balance between occupational and environmental sustainability. The pandemic has made this issue more urgent, bringing to the fore the complex interaction between natural and social systems and the need to promote sustainability. This objective can certainly be pursued. Yet promoting a socially and environmentally sustainable economy – so-called 'Just Transition' – is complicated and risks generating a gap in terms of skills, labour markets, industries, and the areas affected by this process. This research track aims to prompt debate on theory and practice in Just Transition, in order to examine the best practices and the numerous contradictions of the processes investigated. The aim is to bring together traditional and more general approaches (e.g. the theory of capabilities and that of transitional labour markets) in labour law, with a view to deconstruct the opposition between work and the environment.

### Track 9 – Meaning, Motivation and Expectations: New Criteria for Job Evaluation?

Frequent occupational transitions, new skills demand, increasing intellectual and relational work components, together with market instability, characterize the current

world of work, while introducing new evaluation criteria impacts workers' perceptions of their work. Thus, satisfaction, the significance of one's work, personal and professional growth opportunities are now further criteria used for assessing the value of work, which add to traditional economic ones. The underlying reasons behind occupational and career choices are therefore the focus of this track.

## Track 10 – Occupational Health and Safety: Developments, Risks and Skills

Also because of the pandemic, attention has been given to occupational health and safety (OHS) in the public and scientific debate. Discussions concerned ways to ensure workers higher levels of safety, adopting new rules agreed upon between unions and employers. The aim of this track is to examine OHS from different perspectives, considering for example those managing safety issues, new risks and occupational diseases, prevention and training.

## DEADLINES

- Abstracts can be submitted between **7 June** and **13 August 2021**
- Speakers will be notified by **17 September 2021**
- Authors must confirm their participation in the conference by **15 October 2021**
- The final version of papers must be sent by **10 December 2021**

## GUIDELINES FOR ABSTRACT SUBMISSION

Abstracts must be submitted online through the **Abstract Submission Portal**, which also contains detailed instructions for abstract submission.

## SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

Members of the **ADAPT International Scientific Committee**

## PAPERS

The best papers presented at the conference will be selected and, depending on the topic, evaluated for publication in **Diritto delle Relazioni Industriali**, **E-Journal of International and Comparative Labour Studies**, **Professionalità Studi** and **Revista Internacional y Comparada de Relaciones Laborales y Derecho del Empleo**. Editors will also consider for publication the papers by those who are unable to attend the conference but are willing to provide their contribution just the same.

## COSTS

Participation in the conference is free. Participants must bear the expenses of travel and accommodation. A limited number of grants to cover a part of the travel costs will be made available for students or doctoral students whose abstracts present original and valuable research.

## FURTHER INFORMATION

For inquiries, make contact with the Speaker & Abstracts Manager by sending a mail to **[internationalconference2021@adapt.it](mailto:internationalconference2021@adapt.it)**.

## STAY CONNECTED

Updates and news about the 2021 ADAPT International Conference will be provided through the official event website [internationalconference.adapt.it](https://internationalconference.adapt.it) and via social networks ([@ADAPT\\_Bulletin](#) – [@adaptland](#)).