



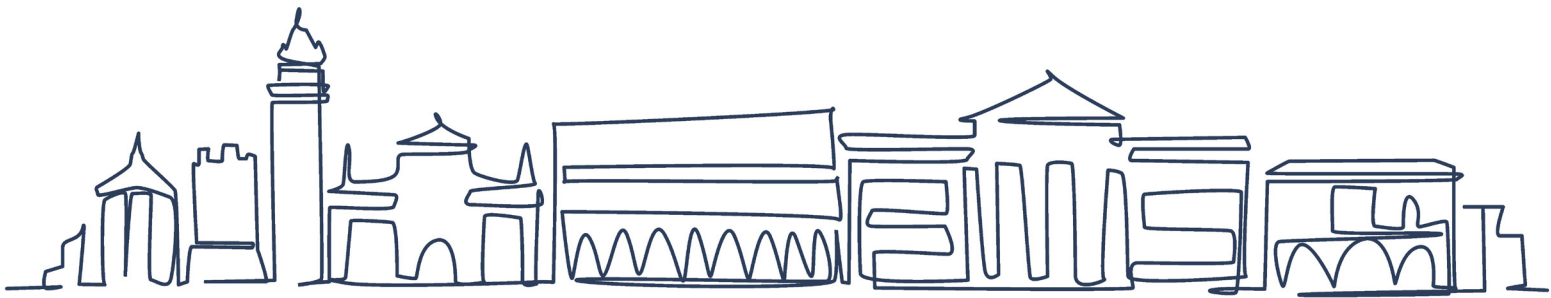
CALL FOR PAPERS

# TOWARDS A WORKLESS SOCIETY?

An Interdisciplinary Reflection  
on the Changing Concept of Work  
and its Rules in Contemporary Economies

International Conference

**Bergamo (Italy), 30 November-2 December 2023**  
**XIII Edition**



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For over a decade ADAPT has been analysing the changes to the world of work, as well as their impact on the economy, society, politics, culture and, above all, people. Work still constitutes a major element of self-definition, both in terms of identity and social role. However, younger generations are seen as having a different attachment to work (that is young people's meaning and purpose of life do not necessarily revolve around work) and indeed the pandemic and new organizational models have triggered re-assessments from others in the labour market. This state of affairs might be due to new ways of working which – along with significant market polarization and dualisms – have led to perceiving work as an undesirable burden that needs to be performed only to ensure subsistence. Consequently, people's need to make a living and their ambitions as individuals seem to collide. But is this interpretation overly simplistic?

In view of these issues, the 2023 edition of the international conference organized by ADAPT's International School of Higher Education in Labour and Industrial Relations aims to bring together academics to investigate the different aspects that affect today's meaning of work for people and their identity. A comparative and interdisciplinary approach will be implemented, in order to address the relevant issues from a broader perspective.

### **Track 1 – The Wage Issue and In-Work Poverty. Dignity, Subsidies and Promotion of Work**

Poverty and social exclusion are not only related to long-term unemployment. Having a job today does not necessarily ensure workers and their families a decent life. In-work poverty, low-paid jobs and low wages are interrelated issues. In-work poverty depends on different factors, among which are: low levels of remuneration, few working hours (involuntary part-time), employment discontinuity, the consequence of tax-benefits systems, and high shares of undeclared work. Needless to say, these aspects mainly affect the most vulnerable categories of workers (women, young people and migrants). Significantly, an EU directive on adequate minimum wages and the promotion of collective bargaining was recently approved precisely with the aim of tackling low wages and in-work poverty, ensuring workers a decent standard of living through their work and closing the gender pay gap. The objective of this research track is to investigate the dynamics that determine these phenomena including from a gender-based perspective – and to identify the policies established to deal with them. Empirical research is welcome to assess the effectiveness of the different measures implemented.

## **Track 2 – Work and Health in Today's Labour Markets**

Investigating the relationship between health and work to understand today's meaning of work entails examining new and old challenges characterizing the dominant economic model. The analysis concerning the First Industrial Revolution already considered the shift from a craft-based to an industrial-based production system and its risks for workers, also in terms of alienation and commodification of work. In a similar vein, the public and the trade union debate has focused on the consequences of automation and the implementation of Taylorist and Fordist models. This was particularly case with respect to the tasks performed by workers, which were increasingly repetitive and monotonous. In current production contexts, these dynamics call for new interpretative approaches, offering those in charge – lawmakers, HR specialists and union representatives – novel tools to deal with these changes. While there is an increasing risk of dehumanizing work, due to algorithmic management and new forms of employee control, there is also counter forces including regulation and action by unions and others. At the same time, perhaps we are seeing a different relationship between individuals (and their sense of identity and work) and work emerging especially among young people. Against this backdrop, and taking into account the evolution of the concept of 'health' as a state of well-being according to a bio-psycho-social model, the links between work and health should be examined from a broader perspective. While safeguarding people, harmonization must be ensured between workers' work and well-being in society.

## **Track 3 – Work and the Crisis of the Welfare State: the Basic Income and the Role of Public Actors**

Current demographic trends and labour market inefficiencies have produced major changes in national welfare systems, also because of their attempt to ensure the effectiveness and sustainability of the benefits provided. The debate that has ensued aimed at identifying the ways social protection systems should be developed, questioning some of the principles on which they have been built in different national contexts. Some have argued in favour of a reduction of public aid in order to prioritise supplementary welfare schemes provided by private bodies. Others have considered offering a basic income to people in need, even in those countries traditionally ensuring public welfare. This latter approach would provide national governments with a new role, offering universal protections for needs that have been neglected so far. In view of the above, this research track investigates to what extent social protection schemes are changing, due to demographic transformations, new needs and economic constraints. The objective is to investigate whether some degree of continuity exists with the mechanisms through which welfare systems have been established in national contexts, or hybridization is taking place among

different national models, further blurring the line between employment-based and universal welfare schemes.

#### **Track 4 – Paid and Unpaid Work: Life Experiences and their Social and Legal Recognition**

With the capitalistic economic model showing its weaknesses due to irreversible political, ecological and demographic processes, work remains a key factor in building social identity and the prerogatives of citizenship. Yet the relationship between work and the production models necessary to overcome the current crises are questioned, while work – conceived as providing individual fulfilment, wellbeing and social meaning – is not exclusively linked to its economic function within a production system. The long-term perspective of work is also changing, particularly for younger generations. In considering the clash between constant growth in consumption and the preservation of human life, the well-established distinction between productive and reproductive labour also fails to evolve, as work traditionally left outside the systems of benefits and protection gains new momentum. Consequently, this research track investigates the meaning of work, analysing the ways for its social and legal recognition in order to acknowledge its content other than ensuring profit in the short term. The focus will be on work in organizations that need to guarantee sustainability, segments that have been given little attention (e.g., unpaid labour, family work, volunteering), and the tools for the legal and economic recognition of work in industries that are decisive for well-being and social cohesion. Finally, this research track will also take into account unpaid working time in the context of platform work, specifically examining care work, artistic and cultural work (e.g. waiting time, transportation time, test time, and preparation time).

#### **Track 5 – Vocational Training: Methods and Tools**

While evolving over time according to different production systems, the relationship between work and training has always been the key to reflecting on the meaning of work. From the craft-based economy onwards, knowledge transfer from the master to the apprentice has been an essential component of work, also preparing individuals for life and social interactions. Industrialization and the consequent compartmentalization of tasks made work repetitive; single tasks were performed in the context of assembly lines, so training was and still is seen as a tool against workers' alienation. On the one hand, the technological transformations of production impose the retraining of workers who, otherwise, risk lacking the skills required by the digital and ecological transition. On the other hand, the relationship between individuals and work is increasingly challenged, especially by younger people, who now choose their job also according to the training opportunities that come with it. Significantly,

work-related policies today promote a number of training schemes, and this can be seen in the national programmes developed under the auspices of *NextGenerationEU*, with the social partners who are also including training in collective and individual agreements. Consequently, this research track wants to focus on theoretical and empirical studies investigating how training might contribute to defining today's content and meaning of work.

### **Track 6 – Work Put to the Test of Individualization and the Crisis of Representation. The Role of the Collective Dimension**

At least until the end of the last century, trade unions had been the main response to problems concerning worker participation and inclusion in most Western countries. In this sense, 'worker participation' was almost used synonymously with 'trade unions'. Today's situation is different, due to factors that have challenged the organizational and institutional power of the union (e.g., tertiarization of the economy, diversification of the workforce and job instability, the rise of neoliberal governments) and the emergence of new and direct forms of worker participation. Examples of this include: 1) the individual management of labour relations that has characterized the most skilled and sought-after professions in the market and that might worsen with the consequent polarization of the workforce; 2) direct worker participation – inspired by the 'lean philosophy' of labour organization and management – that has emerged in industrial sectors since the last century; 3) the establishment of nongovernmental organizations, third-sector entities and bottom-up associations, especially in contexts with a high share of non-national and non-standard workers (*i.e.* agriculture, gig economy, personal care and assistance). Employer representation has also faced new challenges, due to increasing productive and sectoral fragmentation, which has resulted in companies' specific demands, as well as in the push toward centralisation on certain matters (e.g., minimum wage) and decentralisation on others (e.g., in Germany). Accordingly, this research track aims to investigate whether the collective dimension is still decisive in acknowledging people's work, contributing to personal fulfilment and professional identity, and establishing sustainable and inclusive labour markets. Theoretical and empirical research is welcome on issues related to the loss of solidarity and collective governance in the workplace, as well as on old and emerging forms of worker and employer participation, in consideration of their evolution and mutual interaction.

### **Track 7 – Today's Cultural Work: Meaning and Quality**

Cultural industries are witnessing a veritable change in the way culture is accessed and in the construction of the relevant labour market. This is also because of the current technological revolution, which altered the way we

establish relationships and processes. These changes are both cause and effect of the transformations in this sector. The first objective of this research track is to prompt discussions on the evolution of the cultural labour market, in the light of the current social and economic changes, which affect the very role of culture, the way to access it, its production system – also in relation to inclusivity – and cultural workers. The second objective is to discuss research concerning how to update and communicate the meaning of professions in the culture sector, e.g., by clarifying the skills, roles and factors that determine the quality of employment, as the value of cultural work, which is not properly recognized in social terms. This aim should be pursued by analysing the words, patterns and references used when discussing work, culture and innovation. In this context, this research track intends to establish shared terminology, a strategic tool to bring together professions and economies within ‘the cultural word’, looking for new paradigms of meaning and value to think about culture in a sustainable way. Research should help to identify meanings arising from experiences, skills and perspectives of workers, experts and practitioners, with reference to both virtual and real worlds, in order to contribute to developing cultural policies.

### **Track 8 – Work and its Nuanced Meanings across Time: Some New Definitions**

This research track explores the different meanings of ‘work’ across times and societies. The concept of work – and the meanings conveyed by it – has evolved in history, as a result of cultural, social, and economic factors. The boundaries that distinguish work from other activities have been established by different forces, which have shaped this concept and given rise to a number of definitions. Work and its meaning changed following the Industrial Revolution, but other transformations can be observed at different moments in history. Examples of this include the negative connotation attached to this terminology in the classical period, or the way it has been reviewed in modern times. Finally, the meaning of work also changes interdisciplinary. Consequently, what is the origin of the notion of work? If the underlying categories of work – e.g., the way work is organized and performed – change, does this also affect the meaning of this term? How do different disciplines use this terminology today? Is there any overlap or contamination in terms of meaning? Some boundaries – in particular, those concerning the definitions of work and non-work activities – are being challenged today. In this sense, reference is made to the overlap between work and personal life, with the ensuing risks and opportunities; to the notion of consumers’ work, with the consequent redefinition of the term outside the legal constraints and labour market rules; to the integration of training and work (e.g., internships).



## **Track 9 – The Impact of New Technologies on the Employment Relationship: the Difficult Balance with Workers' Private Life**

As a result of the technological progress taking place in recent decades, which has become the focus of the academic debate and of different events at the institutional level, this research track aims to investigate the impact of the 'digital transition' on the employment relationship. The focus will be on 'work-life blending', which has been exacerbated by 1) the disruption of working spaces and time (e.g., through remote work) and 2) the use of next-generation technologies (e.g., Artificial Intelligence, Big Data) enabling employers to monitor employee performance and posing a significant threat to the right to privacy. Lawmakers and social partners alike are implementing initiatives aimed at managing the progressive overlap between professional and private life, focusing for example on the prevention of psychosocial risks related to the excessive use of digital technology (e.g., the regulation of the right to disconnect) or on the protection of workers' personal data. These are just some of the issues addressed by academics and practitioners. This research track welcomes contributions on the new dynamics within the employment relationship and its balance with workers' private lives as a result of technological progress.

## **Track 10 – Economic Changes and Transitional Labour Markets**

For a number of years, the public and academic debate has considered the new dynamics resulting from the new great transformation of work. Rather than by technological development, these changes were brought about by wide-ranging processes affecting the whole social fabric. New demographic, cultural, social and environmental dynamics have been observed that impacted on both modern capitalist economies and developing countries. In this respect, three trends have emerged: 1) more discontinuous and unstable working careers; 2) the emergence of a plurality of labour markets; 3) a new perception of work, along with a need for 'subjectification'. A number of issues have arisen which require attention. Firstly, there is a need to question the effectiveness of the categories and approaches traditionally used to study work. They can no longer be the same adopted in the industrial period, when different working arrangements were in place. A further issue concerns the definition of an integrated system of social and labour policies that must be implemented by different actors to assist people in different living and working conditions. Finally, situations like mass resignations and the demand for higher flexibility on both the demand and the supply side – also for a better work-life balance – presuppose that personal and organizational well-being must be ensured placing the individual centre-stage. Consequently, the objective of this research track is to analyse and contextualise these changes locally and internationally.

## DEADLINES

- Abstracts can be submitted between 9 March and 31 May 2023
- Authors of selected papers will be notified by 18 June 2023
- The final version of papers must be sent by 30 September 2023
- Authors are kindly asked to confirm their in-person attendance by 30 September 2023

## GUIDELINES FOR ABSTRACT SUBMISSION

Abstracts must be submitted on-line through the [Abstract Submission Portal](#), which also contains detailed instructions for abstract submission.

## SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

To ensure high standards, the [ADAPT International Scientific Committee](#) (see below for its members) is fully involved in all the organizational stages of the conference.

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Prof. em. Dr. **Manfred Weiss** (Goethe University, Germany)

Prof. **Adrian Wilkinson** (Griffith University, Australia; University of Sheffield, UK)

## PAPERS

The best papers presented at the Conference will be selected and, depending on the topic, evaluated for publication in **Professionalità Studi**, **Diritto delle Relazioni Industriali**, **E-Journal of International and Comparative Labour Studies** and **Revista Internacional y Comparada de Relaciones Laborales y Derecho del Empleo** or in a special issue to be included in the **ADAPT Labour Studies Book-Series** (Cambridge Scholars Publishing). 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.

## CONFERENCE FEES

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, contact us by sending an email to [fondazioneadapt@gmail.com](mailto:fondazioneadapt@gmail.com).

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