



## Quinzièmes Journées Internationales de Sociologie du Travail (JIST) Athens - 11-12-13 May 2016

### “Crisis/Crises and the Worlds of Work”

Work—an anthropological element at the heart of human civilizations—is being transformed in its social forms by the dynamics of capitalism. It is thus linked to the crises which capitalism recurrently goes into. The term “crisis” has a historical dimension, in the sense of a change that occurs over time and which may, to some extent, lead to what historians call a “historical break”. How should we understand the impact of these crises in the history of the worlds of work? How do their dynamics and the social dynamics that they engender play a part in structuring and destructuring the worlds of work? What is the particular situation at the present time? What lessons can we draw from the past?

The notion of crisis, which has now been reactivated, is a reference frequently mobilized to make sense of the changes that, with globalization, are now affecting the whole world. With the commonly accepted representation that we entered a crisis in 2007—as particularly revealed by the historians’ description of it as a “great recession”—this notion has taken on a new salience as both a category of thought and a category of practice for many social actors. But what meaning should we give to this term “crisis,” which has moreover been in common use for a long time in the sociology of work? Should we even continue to use it once it is accepted that the roots of the current situation go back to a break that occurred forty years ago? One would be tempted to consider that, since the mid-1970s, we have lived through a series of crises within the crisis (implicitly, that of Fordism, or capitalism), that is to say, a continuum of structural changes. Thus, the impacts of the crisis or crises that European societies have gone through since the major financial deregulations in 2007 (financial, debt, and banking crises, but also more generally economic and social crisis) have combined with the changes that accompanied policies and reforms implemented much earlier. The last decade—seen here as a continuation of trends which began further back in time but which, we may hypothesize, contain characteristics and specific effects of their own (effects of rupture, acceleration?)—is the chosen focal point for the JIST 2016.

In the situation they are going through, European countries are experiencing the continuation of the processes of destructuring of the worlds of work as they were constituted after the Second World War. They are seeing the dismantling of the regulations that gave security to these worlds, which are now being subjected to the implications of the new phase of globalization and the neo-liberal policies that accompany them. But, as well as taking stock of and analyzing the forms of these decompositions, should one not also examine the current dynamics in greater depth by giving oneself the means of identifying what might now be in the process of reconstructing itself, both at the level of work and that of an overall social change? If we look back in the past, the crisis of the 1920s-1930s constitutes a key moment and remains a central reference in the repertoire of the facts and representations of crises. But, for all its drama, it nurtured compromises and led to some fundamental restructurings, at least in the Western countries. The New Deal, the social-democratic consensus, the Fordist compromise—all expressions that evoke the dominant forms of regulation of work and of the wage relation in past decades—also sprang from dynamics that emerged from it. Should we not, then, also consider the present crisis in terms of new opportunities?

In the framework of this general problematic, the JIST 2016 are particularly opening up to the countries of the South. The LEST / KEKMOKOP co-organization—with the backing of the Hellenic Social Policy Association—and the choice of Athens as the venue for Journées testify to this commitment. We want to open up, first, to the countries of Southern Europe, which are not only particularly confronted with the effects of the crisis in the form of the austerity regimes that have been put in place, but are also the theater of unprecedented social mobilizations. Are these countries not already “crisis laboratories” in which new norms and new realities of work are being tried out? We also want to open up to the countries of the southern shores of the Mediterranean, which are going through their own specific crises, in which the interdependencies with the countries of the North are accelerating (circulation of goods, capital, persons, etc.) and are directly affecting the framing of work (wage employment, casual work, migration, etc.). More generally we want to open up to countries and continents which, like some countries of Latin America, Africa or Asia, have for a long time been undergoing crises and structural adjustments. What can they teach us? What lessons can we derive from their experience?

In these 15th JIST, we shall examine in depth both the notion of crisis and the realities it covers, questioning and documenting them in the light of the problematics of work, in a twofold movement of decomposition and recomposition. We shall pay particular attention to the scientific and social uses of the notion of crisis, its construction and its empirical forms, whether they are analyzed and/or manifested in terms of class, gender, race or generation.

This call for contributions proposes to order these questionings into different axes which correspond to the main objects and themes of the sociology of work. Can we understand the crisis as an element that analyzes, reveals and accelerates the tendencies that are at work within them and, if so, how?

### **Axis 1. The North(s) and the South(s) seen through the prism of the crisis**

Countries confront the on-going processes in accordance with histories, contexts and temporalities that are specific to each of them. Crises play a part in both homogenizing and differentiating countries, from one another but also within themselves. So there are questions to be asked about the “European model of work” and what is left of it in the present context. In particular, how are the orientations of the policies of the European Union toward the countries of Southern Europe articulated with the very different variants of this model between countries of the North and the South? To what extent do the Memorandum countries (Greece, Portugal, Spain, Ireland) constitute specific zones from which new “worlds of work” might be emerging? Are social alternatives and innovations under construction there? What resistances, what social movements, what forms of mobilization and resistance are appearing? What are the right scales for observing these processes? Are the phenomena of intra- and extra-European migration, mobility and circulation, as a response and strategy of populations faced with the crisis, factors of recomposition of the relations between North and South? All these questions have to be addressed in the framework of new dynamics and new interdependencies taking shape at both European and global level.

### **Axis 2. Work and employment: between decomposition, recomposition and opportunities**

Unemployment, underemployment, precarization, casualization and flexibilization of employment are among the most visible aspects of the crises. We shall examine how the different facets of the wage-earning condition are affected, including the questions of wages, employment conditions and social welfare. We shall take into account the role played by the transformations of labor law and its uses, with regard to both the employment contract and self-employment, and the redrawing of their frontiers. We shall consider what modifications there have been in the global dynamics of income inequality at the macro-social scale and that of wage employment and the active population, and also in the great social divides (class, gender, race, generations, etc.). Can we envisage that there might be a downward process of renewal of wage-earning, in the framework of a growing polarization of the active populations? It will

no doubt be necessary to distinguish the sectors directly affected by the crisis from those that remain dynamic (human services, the functional services of highly skilled, high-tech activities, etc.). While the logics of selectivity lead to the fragilization of specific categories of the workforce (youth, women, older workers, migrants, low-skilled labor, etc.) who are forced to accept worse employment conditions, might there also be winners from the crisis, categories that are little or not affected by it or indeed that benefit from it? Can experiences of unemployment and precarity sometimes be vectors of innovation in forms of activity or in the social uses of more traditional activities? What are the changing combinations between “casual” and “formal” activities, especially in the countries of the South, where the former have been historically massive, even if dynamics of salarization and formalization of informal activities—e.g. through the incentives to declare domestic employment—are now under way? Ultimately, who is experiencing what crisis, and how?

### **Axis 3. Recomposition of the professions in the crisis?**

The division of labor has enabled some activities to be grouped in order to be performed under specific occupational labels, giving those who perform them a certain social visibility as a profession. Some of these professions, over the course of time and through struggles for the definition of their scope of activity and for their modes of internal regulation, have acquired a protective status. Are the professions, and in particular the established professions which enjoy such protection, shielded from the crisis by virtue of their statutory definition, or, on the contrary, does this status appear so exorbitant in a time of crisis that it is open to challenge? Examination of the effects of the crisis must be put to the empirical test of the diversity of the situations habitually grouped under the label of a profession, in various national or international situations. Each case no doubt presents its own complexity. Thus the medical profession, presented as the archetypal established profession, is economically relatively well-cushioned, but the social welfare financing crisis is making it a target of reforms against which part of the profession regularly mobilizes. In what ways, making what concessions, is the power of professionals maintained—or not—in the crisis? They certainly have various arguments at their disposal, depending on whether they may be seen as directly implicated in the crisis, as the banking or finance professions may well have been. Conversely, in sectors put under stress but capable of being seen as all the more crucial to maintain, such as social services, education or health, the professions have arguments to deploy, at the same time as being threatened by the crisis of the public finances. Is the on-going professionalization of certain groups held back or rather accelerated?

### **Axis 4. Organization and content of work**

The crises have effects on work (organization, conditions, content, meaning, activity, health). Do they necessarily intensify the constraints to which waged activities are subject, or can we identify sectors or zones in which the dynamics are more contrasted? How is the organization of work impacted by the development of lean management, benchmarking or New Public Management? How should we understand the extension of independent forms of activity? Does it simply correspond to a decline of waged employment or does it also accompany the necessary recognition of new forms of productive efficiency, especially in the worlds of work with increased cognitive, subjective, and service components? It will be useful to distinguish several types of linkage between crises and work: the impact of financial and economic dynamics, rhetorical uses aimed at legitimating the changes, and the feedback effects of the worsening of working conditions and occupational health on productive performances. Crises also bring opportunities to reactivate the initiative of wage-earners, for example through the takeover of firms in the form of cooperatives. We shall be attentive here to the transformation of the composition of productive structures and modes of organization, in particular through the characteristics related to tertiarization and the restructuring of enterprises in financialized capitalism. In what ways does the context of crisis potentially reconfigure these processes? What are the effects on conditions of employment and qualifications?

## **Axis 5. Policies public, public action**

What role is played by public action in the reconfiguration of the national and European labor markets? We shall examine the direct and indirect roles played by international organizations and the neo-liberal ideologies which often guide them, changes in law and especially labor law— in terms of deregulation and also the emergence of new regulations, for example at the level of employer–trade union relations. It would also be useful to consider the way in which, both in the orientation of policies and in the decisions taken within enterprises, crisis rhetoric is used as a mode of justification and legitimation of structural changes. Public policies are developed on a series of scales that need to be distinguished in order to study their implications for work and employment. However, employment policies in the crisis can also be observed “from below”, in services such as the French employment agency Pôle Emploi.

## **Axis 6. Work and activities outside work**

Does the crisis redistribute the cards between work and “outside work”, and, if so, how? Or, in a more materialist perspective, how does it affect the multiple activities of (re)production in the different spheres of life (work, family, volunteerism, activism, arts, intimate and friend relationships, etc.), and the relationship between them? Can we measure the effects of the economic crisis on domestic work, its gendered distribution and its processes of delegation? Is the economic crisis producing—and if so, for which categories of the population— forms of reinvestment in family and domestic life, or rather in public life? What changes are taking place in activist and volunteer practices in response to the worsening of the labor market? Beyond the “crisis” and the questions it raises for the capitalist system, are we not observing, in political discourses and also in sociological works, a revaluing of new forms of social organization of activity, outside employment, which is reinventing ways of working? What are these forms and what is their significance for today’s changing world of work?

## **Axis 7. Adaptations, resistances, and mobilizations**

The crises are also a deep crisis of political representation and activist commitments. This sometimes takes the form of a general distrust of the governing elites, political institutions and, more broadly, the intermediate institutions that are supposed to represent employees and citizens. In most countries, the more traditional and organized forms of collective resistance and mobilization brought out by the crises are accompanied by and combined with forms of mutual aid and solidarity to compensate for the shortcomings of the public structures, and also new forms of citizens’ mobilization, often led by highly educated young people. These movements have often been seen as radically at odds with the worlds of work in general and trade unions in particular. Is this really and everywhere the case? More broadly we shall reflect on the potential social alternatives that are being (re)constructed and what is driving them. To what extent are employees’ and citizens’ rights to representation being mobilized to promote these alternatives? Are we seeing a renewal of practices, favoring a more systematic expression of direct democracy? Are there emerging, here and there, on various scales, socio-political compromises in the different dimensions of the wage relation (work, status, income, social welfare, etc.), and with what impacts? Is the crisis, for example, albeit by constraint, the opportunity for the emergence of new relations to consumption (recycling, etc. ), a questioning of the foundations of the present division of labor (short-circuits in trade, etc.), and the development of new solidarities taking over from the Welfare State (intra-generational, associative, and informal solidarities, etc.)? We may ask what are the utopias of today that underpin debates about the future and/or are already structuring new practices: new ideas or the resurgence of oppositional utopias of the past?

## Submission of communications / Calendar

Paper proposals : send an abstract of 2500 characters (maximum), including spaces and punctuation, presenting the topic, theoretical background, empirical mediums, and main results, before **October 15th**. The abstract, preferably written in French (but otherwise in Spanish, Greek, or English) should be posted on the platform Sciencesconf : you must first create an account on this platform : <http://jist2016.sciencesconf.org/user/createaccount>

When connecting to the JIST site, <http://jist2016.sciencesconf.org>, you will be able to post your abstract (Dépôts/Déposer un résumé) by copying your text in the box provided for that purpose. If you need help the site includes a section called « Aide au dépôt des résumés » in the section « Calendrier ».

The Scientific Committee will give an answer on **December 15th, 2015**.

The final text of the paper, between 30.000 to 50.000 characters (including spaces and punctuation), will be written in French, and sent as an e-mail attachment to [jist2016@sciencesconf.org](mailto:jist2016@sciencesconf.org) before **March 1st, 2016**.

A grant will be allocated to a few post-doctoral researchers and PhD students coming from the « South » on the basis of scientific criteria. See the allocation procedures on the JIST website.

## Our coordinates

**Website : <http://jist2016.sciencesconf.org>**

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