



Titel/Title:

Autor*innen/Author(s):

Veröffentlichungsversion/Published version:

Zeitschriftenartikel/Journal article

Empfohlene Zitierung/Recommended citation:

Verfügbar unter/Available at:

(wenn vorhanden, bitte den DOI angeben/please provide the DOI if available)

Zusätzliche Informationen/Additional information:

Introduction: Work Unbound?

Patterns of Work and Organization in German Media and Cultural Industries

Karin Gottschall and Harald Wolf

Capitalist development of technology and organization and the ‘liberation’ of market relations from traditional bindings have always been considered to undermine traditional social boundaries. Already Marx and Engels are known to emphasize the “(c)onstant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation . . .” as typical marks of capitalism, and notice, “. . . (a)ll fixed, fast-frozen relations . . . are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air . . .” (Marx and Engels 1978: 476). Against the backdrop of ‘globalization’ and the diffusion of information technology, however, it seems as if we are faced with a new quality of flexibilization and disembedding of economical and technical activities. The future of work in developed capitalism in general appears to be characterized by disintegration and shifting or blurring boundaries of work and life.

Reflecting these trends, social sciences have identified a fundamental shift from Fordist to post-Fordist regimes or a far-reaching “disorganization of capitalism” (Lash and Urry 1993). A wide range of issues is at stake in this general debate, but as one central trend it is assumed that knowledge-intensive work arrangements become crucial in the current (**← p. 11**) phase of capitalism. The older debate about the coming of an information society is revitalized, although with altered emphasis. While some authors stress the increasing commodification and industrialization of the cultural sphere as the main aspect of this new phase (Lacrois and Tremblay 1997), others point out the general impact of the network form and the importance of knowledge as a key economic factor. This leads to concepts of a network society (Castells 1996) or a knowledge capitalism (Burton-Jones 1999), both referring to a changed entrepreneurial and organizational logic, perceived to be no longer centered on hierarchy, but on project-work (Boltanski and Chiapello 1999).

There is considerable evidence supporting the impression of a global trend of disintegration of organizations and of work unbound. This includes a partial retracing of state involvement and “de-regulation” of work relations in the context of long-term mass unemployment as well as the extension of flexible forms of business organization oriented along the model of “network-businesses” (Castells 1996: 151ff). New fields of activity with decentralized structures, broad application of networked ICT, internal markets/commercialization, franchising and cross company networking are emerging. At the same time researchers identify a transformation of work into “knowledge work”, and of management into “knowledge management” often accompanied by new concepts of work (McKinlay 2005). Moreover, we can observe the erosion of the standard employment pattern and a parallel increase of precarious employment (fixed term contracts, leased work, increased employment within the undefined area of dependant and freelance employment etc.), indicating a blurring of boundaries even between employee and employer – as expressed in the ideal type of the “entreployee” (Pongratz and Voß 2003; Felstead and Jewson 1999). Flexible labor is comprised of a more flexible regime of working hours (increase of part time work and flexibility of the duration, location and distribution of working hours) and in the spatial dimension, the blurring of work place boundaries (for instance due to telework, leased work, projects transcending the company

unit). Last but not least, boundaries between work and non-work (free time, family etc.) disappear or become more diffuse.

Social sciences concerned with work and organization issues try to capture these trends with a shift of interest. The focus is no longer on (← p. 12) control but rather on flexibility: on flexible labor markets (Rubery 2005), flexible organizations, and flexible industrial and economic systems (Procter 2005). In German social sciences this shift assumed a very special shape. It encouraged a veritable “destructuration discussion” (Plum 1990) and in its course all facets of flexible labor have been pithily re-named as *Entgrenzung*, literally, a de-limitation or a removal of boundaries. Such ‘de-limitations’ have been considered the

. . . leading tendency of current changes of work relationships *overall*, which affects *all* social levels of the state of work: international structures and structures of work relating to the whole of society, company organization from the within and the outside, work place structures and the immediate working behavior as well as, finally and in particular, the working subjects, that is their personality and characteristics (above all, their qualifications) and their living conditions. (Voß 1998: 474)

However, this generalizing approach has pitfalls from a theoretical as well as an empirical point of view, inasmuch as it assumes a ‘disorganizing’ transformation of work as a general and unchallenged trend, including homogenous outcomes. Against the background of different national labor market regimes, as well as a segmentation of national labor markets, we expect that the transformation of work is limited and heterogeneous and that dynamics vary and are not simultaneous. Referring to the insights of the varieties of capitalism debate (Crouch and Streeck 1997; Hall and Soskice 2001), it should be asked, then, to what degree the shaping of such general trends of ‘de-limitation’ depend on the specific institutional setting of capitalist development.

From a basic theoretical point of view, too, the assumption of a fundamental change of work can be questioned. Drawing on Giddens’ “duality of structure” (1984) and the concept of the economy as “institutional process” – i.e., the embedding of economic transactions in the social context, achieved through specific institutional mechanisms (Polanyi 1944), we have to take into account that there are always two sides of the coin. The picture of seemingly boundary-less market and organizational phenomena has to be completed by the other side of an ongoing reshaping of work structures and the alteration of institutional arrangements in which they are embedded. The idea of a (← p. 13) “dis-embedding” of social relations by “commercialization” (or money), developed, again, by Giddens (1990), as well as their simultaneously necessary “re-embedding” in local social structures, fits here: on the one hand, processes of *Entgrenzung* are to be interpreted as a (partial) switch from one embedding regime to another, from the (bureaucratic) expert systems to market systems. On the other hand, the re-embedding mechanisms – social norms, relationships and forms of co-operation which limit the ‘de-limitation’ – are to be made apparent. In this sense, the emerging new patterns of work are simultaneously characterized by boundary loss *and* by new and old other institutional boundaries. To understand how new forms of work are dis- and re-embedded, therefore, should be a main issue of critical labor research.

This symposium sets out to examine the dynamics of flexibilization of work in German media and cultural industries based on recent research (2002 to 2005) of the interdisciplinary research network *Grenzen der Entgrenzung von Arbeit* (“Limits of the de-limitation of work boundaries”; cf. Mayer-Ahuja and Wolf 2005). As “de-limitation” trends are supposed to be

well-developed in certain sectors of the economy (namely IT, other knowledge-intensive services, biotech, etc.), the network focused on such a “trend sector”, namely new media and the cultural industry. This area comprises, on the one hand, new business and employment forms at the intersection of IT, telecommunication and media (e.g., Internet services); on the other hand, the “old” media (TV production, print media) as well as traditional professions and employment conditions of artists, publicists and scientists in theatres, the opera, cultural projects and museums, partly with public, increasingly, however, also private ownership. Assumedly, this sector already, and, to some extent, even traditionally is characterized by trends of flexible work. Moreover, new media and cultural industries are a growing economic sector in terms of capital investment and employment while at the same time this sector, at least in Germany, has been largely ignored by previous labor research.

The six network projects, sponsored by the German Ministry of Education and Research (*Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung (BMBF)*) within a Priority Program on the ‘Future of Labor Studies’ integrate research perspectives from the sociology of work (Mayer-Ahuja and Wolf), business studies (Manning and Sydow), gender (← p. 14) studies and labor market/employment sociology (Gottschall and Henninger), labor law (Bleses), industrial relations research (Abel and Pries) as well as work psychology (Mader, Miels and Volmerg).

Let us give a brief overview of the following articles, which are all based on research work in these projects. Stephan Manning and Jörg Sydow begin in discussing organizational forms beyond and between firms. They examine how ‘project networks’ in the German TV production transform creative potential for and beyond particular projects, therefore becoming an important new binding force for actors and processes alike. The dialectic of network-based control, enabling and constraining this transformation, refers to the capacity of actors to reproduce relational power and autonomy within actor constellations.

Karin Gottschall and Annette Henninger then address the patterns of work and private life among freelancers in German media industries (journalists, designers, software developers). As they show, only a minority of these freelancers has thoroughly blurred the boundaries between work and private life, while most others still draw a clear line between the two. Findings also indicate that although structurally equal dual-earner arrangements are widespread, they are by far not the only type of gender arrangement in this employment field.

Then, with the contribution of Nicole Mayer-Ahuja and Harald Wolf we move to organizational forms within the firm: the nature and development of project-work, flexible employment-relationships, flat hierarchies and indirect control in German Internet-companies. It is shown, how widespread expectations of creative tasks and egalitarian work-structures by employees are increasingly confronted with the realities of routine work, stable employment, formal hierarchical structures and direct control under the conditions of the ‘normalization’ of this new organizational field.

In the next article, Sabine Mader, Just Miels, and Birgit Volmerg give insights in implementation and consequences of ‘New Public Management’ instruments in German cultural establishments. They figure out structural shortcomings, an increase of administrative tasks and a lack of organizational trust, supposed to be essential for an effective implementation of this ‘de-limitation’ strategy.

On the level of industrial relations and back in the Internet and multimedia industry, Jörg Abel and Ludger Pries study the relationship (← p. 15) between individual and collective

forms of interest representation in the firm. They point out that mixed forms of labor regulation have evolved out of the traditional ideal types of representation (self-representation, alternative forms and works councils) and identify opposing trends: growing conformity with patterns of collective interest representation known from other industries and at the same time a stable convergence as far as the constellation of individual and/or collective forms of regulation is concerned.

In the final article, still referring to industrial relations but changing the angle, Peter Bleses focuses on the managerial interests for more autonomy at the expense of collective agreements in wage formation in the German broadcasting sector. The author describes different autonomy strategies and presents, in respect to the role of labor law, as result, that in this dimension no ‘de-limitation’ was needed: Contrary to the usual assumption that German labor law hinders flexibility, employers in this study did not see the process of wage formation extremely restricted by it.

The research network could also profit from international cooperation. All projects were matched with researches from Europe and the US in order to provide a comparative perspective on the German findings. Thus the project findings were carefully and critically commented at a mid-term conference in Berlin in 2004 by international colleagues with whom we collaborated. Christoph Clases, Rosalind Gill, Susan Christopherson, Paul Thompson, Chris Warhurst, Fredrik Augustsson, Ake Sandberg, Henning Salling Olesen, Christel Lane and Brian Bercusson provided a comparative view and served to push further our arguments, for which we want to thank them all here. Parallel to this special issue, their contributions are made available online – inviting also further critical comments from elsewhere. Please visit www.netzwerkarbeitsforschung.de (“News”).

Obviously our findings on the ‘limits of de-limitation’ are nation specific and have to be assessed in the wider horizon of different socioeconomic constellations. Drawing on the rough distinction between liberal market economies (with the US and the UK as prime examples) and coordinated market economies (for instance the Swedish and the German model) questions on divergence as well as convergence arise. (**← p. 16**) Do work and institutional patterns in German cultural and media industries display global trends of flexibilization following a neo-liberal market hegemony and thus prove to be an experimental field of convergence of capitalist models? Or do they rather indicate nation and regime specific patterns of work?

In line with recent scholarship examining the knowledge economy (see Walby and others 2007), our findings reveal a complex picture. On the one hand German media and cultural industries are characterized by an increase of flexibility in work patterns and employment regulation and compared to other national knowledge intensive industries they may well be a pioneer. But on the other hand these tendencies neither follow a one-best-way-logic of de-limitation of work nor do we find a radical deregulation of work or dissolution of boundaries between work and private life. Rather our findings demonstrate that counteracting forces and continuity of the standard work model still are alive. It seems that the nation specific mechanisms of a coordinated market economy prevail thus opposing or mediating the otherwise strong trends of globalization in the media and cultural industries. So indicators for a convergence of the German labor market regime with liberal market economies are still weak. Compared to other countries flexibilization of work in Germany still goes hand in hand with a high degree of regulation. In comparative perspective the long shadow of the specific

model of standard work in Germany, the so-called *Normalarbeitsverhältnis* with its high degree of regulation and benefit maintenance, seems to extend to new forms of work and to shape flexibility in a specific way (Gottschall and Kroos 2007).

This normative and substantial robustness of the standard work model even may explain why German social sciences have coined their term *Entgrenzung* and assess changes in work regulation as ‘*de-limitation*’ rather than flexibilization. In this sense the German discourse on de-limitation of work may well stimulate the international debate since it demands to be sensitive for nation-specific institutional features of society and economy which profile capitalism even in times of globalization in quite different ways. (← p. 17)

References

- Boltanski, Luc and Ève Chiapello. 1999. *Le nouvel esprit du capitalisme*. Paris: Editions Gallimard.
- Burton-Jones, Alan. 1999. *Knowledge capitalism: business, work and learning in the new economy*. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press.
- Castells, Manuel. 1996. *The Rise of the Network Society*. Malden/Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Crouch, Colin and Wolfgang Streeck, eds. 1997: *Political Economy of Modern Capitalism. Mapping Convergence and Diversity*. London and others: Sage.
- Felstead, Alan and Nick Jewson. 1999. *Global trends in Flexible Labour*. Melbourne and others: Macmillan Publishers Australia.
- Giddens, Anthony. 1984. *The Constitution of Society*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- . 1990. *The Consequences of Modernity*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Gottschall, Karin and Daniela Kroos. 2007. Self-Employment in Comparative Perspective. General Trends and the Case of New Media. In Sylvia Walby and others, eds., *Gendering the Knowledge Economy. Comparative Perspectives*. Houndmills/Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Hall, Peter A. and David W. Soskice, eds. 2001. *Varieties of Capitalism, The Institutional Foundations of Comparative Advantage*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lacrois, Jean-Guy and Gaetan Tremblay. 1997. “Trend Report: The ‘Information Society’ and Cultural Industries Theory”. *Current Sociology* 45 (4): 1–154.
- Lash, Scott and John Urry. 1993. *Economies of sign and space*. London: Sage.
- Marx, Karl and Frederick Engels. 1978 [1848]. “The Manifesto of the Communist Party”, in Robert Tucker, ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader*. Second edition. New York: W.W. Norton, 69–500.
- Mayer-Ahujá, Nicole and Harald Wolf, eds. 2005. *Entfesselte Arbeit – neue Bindungen. Grenzen der Entgrenzung in der Medien- und Kulturindustrie*. Berlin: Edition sigma.

- McKinlay, Alan. 2005. Knowledge Management. In Stephen Ackroyd and others, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Work and Organization*. Oxford/New York: 242–262.
- Plum, Wolfgang. 1990. “Entstrukturierung und sozialpolitische Normalitätsfiktion”. *Soziale Welt* 41 (4): 477–497.
- Polanyi, Karl. 2001 [1944]. *The Great Transformation. The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Pongratz, Hans J. and G. Günter Voß. 2003. “From employee to ‘entreployee’: Towards a ‘self-entrepreneurial’ work force?”. *Concepts and Transformation* 8 (3): 239–254.
- Procter, Stephen. 2005. Organizations and Organized Systems: From Direct Control to Flexibility. In Stephen Ackroyd and others, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Work and Organization*. Oxford/New York: 462–484.
- Rubery, Jill. 2005. Labor Markets and Flexibility. In Stephen Ackroyd and others, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Work and Organization*. Oxford/New York: 31–51.
- Voß, G. Günter. 1998. “Die Entgrenzung von Arbeit und Arbeitskraft”. *Mitteilungen aus der Arbeitsmarkt- und Berufsforschung* 31 (3): 473–487.
- Walby, Sylvia, Heidi Gottfried, Karin Gottschall and Mari Osawa, eds. 2007. *Gendering the Knowledge Economy. Comparative Perspectives*. Houndmills/Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan. (← p. 18)