

REMEMBERING THE FACTORY: INDUSTRIAL PASTS AND PRESENTS

This thematic section is an attempt to contribute to the growing trend of cultural and anthropological research into “ordinary human” reactions to the clash of contemporary work politics with memories of work of a time when the “conveyor belt” was a symbol of prosperity and human biographies were mostly linear, both in the West and in the East. This is one of the central topics of the project “Transformation of Work in Post-Transitional Croatia” (TRANSWORK, Croatian Science Foundation, IP-2016-06-7388), and was also featured in a panel held at the 14th Congress of SIEF (2019), which we co-organized with the Leibnitz-Institut für Ost- und Südosteuropaforschung at Regensburg. Papers by Tanja Petrović, João Santos and Petar Bagarić were presented there. Iva Kosmos, Nina Vodopivec and Jozefina Ćurković submitted their articles in response to a subsequent wider call.

The articles in this theme section deal with the industrial past and present by analyzing and exploring ethnographic fields characterized by disappearance: closure of large shipyards (Santos) and factories (Kosmos, Petrović, Vodopivec, Ćurković), erasing the once clear boundary between work and leisure, and the middle class sliding to the bottom of social stratification (Bagarić). At the same time, the texts indicate how industrial, non-industrial and postindustrial experiences meet in the creation of “industrial heritage” and “reactualization of the factory narrative” (Ćurković), in ownership restructuring (Vodopivec, Santos) as well as in the tension between the manufacturing and the non-manufacturing sector, which dates back to the period of socialism (Kosmos, Petrović). On the other hand, the memories of work as it once was recorded by the authors of the articles reinforce the established “nostalgic memories of socialism”: the factory which was considered “ours”, in the Yugoslav case not so much as a direct result of the 1950 Basic Law on Management of State-Owned Enterprises and Higher Business Associations by Labor Collectives, but because several family members frequently worked in the same factory, because the factory was the generator of social life and urban changes, and a guarantee of security and prosperity for individuals and the community (Vodopivec). Changes in the world of work mentioned in the articles, including the shift from the culture of solidarity to the culture of competitiveness and individualism (Santos, Bagarić), demonstrate the need to challenge interpretations of narratives of “loss” arising around the notion of nostalgia both in the West and the East, which are applied even to factual statements, thus normalizing the idea of work as flexible, mobile, sometimes even risky, and frequently precarious.

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