

“Employment relations in the 21st century: Challenges for interdisciplinary research in a changing world of work”

CALL FOR PAPERS

INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS IN EUROPE CONFERENCE (IREC) 2018

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Leuven (Belgium)

Organizers:

Centre for Sociological Research (CeSO), Faculty of Social Sciences, KU Leuven
Institute for Labour Law, Faculty of Law, KU Leuven

In association with:

European Sociological Association Research Network 17,
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KU LEUVEN



IREC 2018

Since the beginning of the 20th century Industrial Relations (IR), as a multidisciplinary field of study of employment relationships (Kaufman, 1993), has had the analytical and normative concern to extend democracy from the political to the economic sphere. It considered trade unions, their systems of employee representation and collective bargaining institutions as the main forms of employees' voice or social governance at the workplaces, contributing to balancing power in employment relationships.

In recent years, these institutions have faced dramatic difficulty to grow. At the same time, transformation processes such as globalization and market internationalization, global value chains and restructuring, labour market flexibilisation and digitalization of work have (and are) concurred to challenge the regulatory environment of employment, labour markets and welfare systems by reducing the scope of social protection, changing the types of employment while increasing inequality and diversity amongst individuals in society. Such developments hit at the very core of what was traditionally conceived as the employment relationship by therefore creating an inexorably intellectual crisis for scholars of employment, industrial relations, labour law as well as related disciplines. There is thus a need to search for new directions for theory and research which can help addressing the main challenges in today's changing world of work. At the same time, there is the urgent need to deepening the study on the aforementioned transformations and its effects on the employment relationship through an interdisciplinary approach.

This implies to look at creating new and innovative ways to not only filling the representation gap left by declining unionism, but also examining how to enhance labour and social protection for citizens, guaranteeing sustainability for labour markets while strengthening the role of social justice and (public) policy interventions during times that are characterized by increasing

change, complexity and diversity. Furthermore, a debate about the role of regulation and labour law to ensure fairness and social protection of different groups of workers in the changing world of work is needed.

The conference proposes to focus more intensively on creating an in-depth understanding of the changing world of work, its main transformations and the challenges the latter poses to classical industrial and employment relations theories as well as to labour law. What do these changes and challenges require researchers in employment and industrial relations and related disciplines to revise? To what extent are existing concepts and theories still able to capture what is changing in today's world of work? What are the implications for epistemology, research methods and methodologies overall? The institutional void of declining unionism, collective and individual representation as well as collective bargaining is an expression of more profound transformations happening in labour markets and welfare systems (Ackers, 2002; Lakhani et al. 2013; Piore and Safford, 2006; Tapia et al., 2015). Thereby, we should engage in the theoretical and empirical exercise to think about what all this implies for the field of employment, law or industrial relations studies overall.

The conference aims at bringing this interdisciplinary potentiality to the fore while focusing on the key areas where change concerning the traditional institutional void of industrial and employment relations studies, including labour law, has taken place. Each area deals with the changing world of work overall (including forms, structures, identity and nature). Thereby, the conference aims at extending our understanding around the implications of change for each indicated area. In so doing, the expected result is to stimulate further debate around how industrial and employment relations theory and research, including methods and methodologies, can progress further to address the new needs in the changing world of work.

We propose the following nine themes:

Theme 1 Transforming work, employment relations and labour law

Theme 2 "New" and "old" actors: changing roles and strategies

Theme 3 European social and economic governance: consequences for industrial relations and labour law

Theme 4 Transnational employment relations, regulation and labour standards

Theme 5 Social divisions in labour markets and workplaces

Theme 6 Voice at work: collective representation and employee participation

Theme 7 Justice, fairness, equality and diversity at work

Theme 8 The future of collective organisation, collective action and related rights

Theme 9 Sustainable labour markets: welfare and social protection, working conditions, job quality and work-life balance

Prospective participants are asked to submit abstracts of maximum 500 words by **February 1st, 2018**.

Authors of all proposals will be notified about the results of their abstracts' evaluation by the members of Scientific Board and Organizing Committee by the latest **March 31st, 2018**. More information can be found at soc.kuleuven.be/ceso/wo/erlm/irec-call