

Epilogue: A Research Agenda for the Future

From the contributions to this Colloquium, several elements to a research agenda for the future emerge. These can be briefly summed up as follows:

- (a) It remains to be seen whether radical conceptual shifts are required in labour law and industrial relations theory; it might be the case that there is first and foremost a crisis of industrial relations practice, rather than of labour law and industrial relations theory. Yet, a significant change of practice is likely to demand a rethinking of current theoretical positions. New lines of thinking and theorizing have already come to the fore. Moreover interesting concepts have been launched, such as a broad concept of the employment relationship, which moves beyond mere (legal) contractual relations and responsibilities; the related concept of industrial or occupational citizenship; the concept of reflexivity, which refers to the balancing of (economic) performance and (social) functions within self-regulatory systems; the concept of fundamental social rights in a global context; and – one might add – the (very recently coined) concept of ‘flexicurity’: which refers to a well-considered and sound trade-off between flexibilization of the labour market (including a slight deterioration of the legal employment protection of so-called core-workers) on the one hand, and a significant increase in employment and social security for contingent workers and other groups that are at risk in the labour market on the other hand;
- (b) At any rate, multidisciplinary is a prerequisite. Lessons can be learned from history, political economy, geography and international law. Moreover, traditional distinctions between aspects of the employment relationship (labour conditions, occupational safety and health, codetermination and participation, labour relations, etc.) seem to have lost their meaning, and so have social policies that are strictly limited to single issues. We should aim at a broad and comprehensive approach to the overall issue of work and organization;
- (c) There is a need to deconstruct the implicit normative assumptions in neo-liberal economism, together with a need for discourse analysis pertaining to the phenomenon of globalization; scientific analysis should not neglect the importance of its critical role;
- (d) On the one hand, research should focus on the conditions for successful institutional change, e.g. on the way systems of collective bargaining can be innovated (with respect to both content and procedures, and structures). Institutional arrangements should not be considered to be at odds with economic performance. Neither, should flexibility and efficiency be viewed as incompatible with labour standards;

- (e) And, on the other hand, there is a need to explore so-called functional equivalents and 'flanking policies' to traditional methods, instruments and systems of regulation. This implies a study of new opportunities both at a transnational and at a workplace level (i.e. a twofold approach). In the case of transnational regulation, the question is which regulatory actors are conceivable or already in place, which can promote, facilitate or even enforce certain standards of employment. These standards will somehow have to relate to matters such as economic benefits and equity (also in regard to the relation between the 'first', 'second' and 'third' world).

At the workplace level, research should concentrate on the 'law of the workplace', i.e. various kinds of informal and indigenous arrangements and procedures that represent normative frameworks and standards. Naturally, power relations at the workplace level should not, under any circumstances, be ignored. Attention should be drawn to new and existing forms of indirect and direct participation of workers, and the way these are and could be linked.