

**“The Work and Employment Grey Zone:  
Making Sense of Labor Market Transformations in Globalization”**

**Thematic:** « Politique et Société »

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Apparently paradoxical approaches to comprehending 21<sup>st</sup> century labor market trends shed light upon certain tendencies but tend to overshadow others. Academia explores increasingly segmented forms of insiders and outsiders, precarious work and bad jobs. International organizations and policy making spheres – OECD, European Union, etc. – have adopted, to the contrary, indicators of the supposed health of labor markets so broad that they tend to blur the very nature of work and employment situations, notably the most precarious, that of the “employment rate”, not to mention the ILO’s “decent work”. At the same time, both approaches, be they labor market segmentation or overarching macro-blurred views, are fundamentally based on statistics, categories and mindsets still anchored in binary 20<sup>th</sup> century wage labor society.

The “work and employment grey zone” (WEGZ) is a notion that starts from the premise that these categories and mindsets in global labor markets and employment relationships have reached their functional limits of significance. The approach adopted here is that: Labor market transformations themselves must be the focal, their tensions and transitions display elements of coherence as they are rooted in once standard employment relationships from which they take more or less distance, and in various ways.

In Europe, the concept of grey zone has been mobilized by the Italian jurists in the 1990s and then jurist A. Supiot, regarding the blurring of boundaries between employment and self-employment among EU countries. The WEGZ notion mobilized here takes into account multiple dimensions and stakeholders. In the United States and throughout the world, the Uber phenomenon and the development of digital platforms have extended the grey zone by raising the issue of the legitimacy and extent of the discretion of employers and the grey zone as a “public space” (Azaïs, Dieuaide, Kesselman, 2017). In Latin America, this concept has supplanted older distinctions between formal and informal sectors to emphasize their arrangement in family strategies and also on the place and role of the market (Rosenfield, 2018) and the state in building informality (Azaïs, Carleial [ed.], 2017).

The deconstruction-fragmentation of binary categories and institutions has given way to the de-coherence of academic and social policy categories, the multiplication of stakeholders and of the layers at which they interact (Kesselman, 2017), the disconnection between the supposed beneficiaries of public social policy and those who actually have access to them, the legal voids and lack of documentation of employers and workers attempts to circumvent regulations and constraints to their own advantage (Bureau, Dieuaide, 2018).

On all continents, WEGZs also encompass micro-political processes of social regulation. These processes do not necessarily accommodate social compromises. They are power games initiated directly by stakeholder actors, which are reflected in wide and varied institutional dynamics, ranging from circumventing rules to more radical processes of self-institutionalization.

This call for papers is intended for jurists, economists, sociologists and political scientists who are interested in transformations of labor market norms and the relevance of employment relationship nexus institutions in a context of persistence and multiplication of WEGZ. They include a broad spectrum of issues, such as efficiency and/or defect of the rule of law; the importance of areas of lawlessness in the functioning of wage relationship institutions; micro-political processes of social regulation; the place and role of soft law in local social regulation; the emergence of new actors in civil society and challenges to the foundations of social citizenship of growing layers of workers.

Contributions, especially comparative perspectives, are especially welcome regarding:

- 1) Examples of WEGZ in the United States and Canada: sectoral approach; emergence of NGOs and civil society as new figures in employment systems and industrial relations; redefinition of union strategies; place and role of immigration.
- 2) Examples of WEGZ in Latin America: sectoral approach; innovative roles played by individual actors; place and role of the state in the persistence of gray areas; place and role of the phenomenon of corruption.
- 3) WEGZ and *gig economy* : sociology of employment in *gig economy* ; level and training of revenues; dynamic employment adjustments; law and social protection.
- 4) WEGZ, nature and dynamic (s) of institutional change: uncompromising social regulation or social regulation beyond norms? Convergence with the US model? Political capacity of actors and institutional change.

## References

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