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Capability at Work

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Input to Session 9.06
»Reasons to value work«

■ Basics – or: how to frame the debate

■ **Capability Approach: an (underspecified) paradigm, not a theory**

- Capabilitarian accounts of work cannot be deducted from the paradigm (or from Sen)
- Paradigm can provide a common language

■ **Needed: not » the one« account ...**

- ... but a framework for reflexion on different accounts

■ **Diversity in capabilitarian accounts of work can result from ...**

- difference in understanding the Capability Approach
- difference in research purpose
- difference in »metatheoretical commitments », »ontological theories« (Robeyns 2017) on work

■ My work-related research interests ...

■ Class formation, class analysis

- work situation and labour status as a determinant of class
- precarious (e.g non-standard) vs. protected work (involving both dimensions)

■ Institutional regimes structuring labour market and labour process

■ Employability and agency in labour market transitions

- Unemployment as an involuntary, not valuable labour status

■ Interactive service work – managed co-production with »clients«, »recipients«

■ Sustainable work in ecosocial transformation

- Workers as agents of industrial reconversion, decarbonization

■ Note: work and workers as subject matter, not overall well-being

- While having done social reporting as well

■ ... and my theoretical backpack ...

■ **Work as specifically human activity (anthropological status)**

- Useful and purposeful activity
 - mediating »metabolism« (Marx) of humans with nature
 - interacting in collective reproduction of the species

■ **How work is organised is a determining feature of social formations**

- late and precarious societal inventions:
 - separation of paid / unpaid work,
 - distinct worlds of work, leisure, reproduction

■ **Work always involves the worker as a person**

- Attachment to work, subjective evaluation of work – even in alienated form as wage labour and in degrading conditions

■ Bringing the capability approach in

■ Ask not how to fit work into the capability paradigm ...

- ... but rather what capability can bring to labour studies

■ The promise of capability

- Multidimensional approach
- Distinction between (potential) capabilities and (realised) functionings
- Emphasis on individual valuation and agency

■ Specifically »capabilitarian« issues with work

- Work is not a single functioning or (potential) capability but a bundle
- Work-related functionings, like others, have both instrumental and constitutive value, i. e. can be potential capabilities
- Normative individualism allows for collective agency

■ No good reason for »theoretical exceptionalism« with reference to work

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- **Some prior considerations on the evaluative space of work-related doings and beings one may have reason to value**

 - **Social forms of work**
 - Paid labour, labour force status: formal / informal, wage labour and self employed
 - Reproduction work: caregiving, household and subsistence work

 - **Wage labour: subject to politics (relations) in / of production (Burawoy 1985)**
 - Work aspect: production process, -regime
 - Employment aspect: labour market, wage relations, labour-welfare nexus

 - **What to value in work (Paugam 2000): workers as ...**
 - homo faber: self-realisation, professional pride, attachment to product
 - homo oeconomicus: market value, compensation for degrading conditions
 - homo sociologicus: social relations at workplace

 - **Sustainable work: consequences for worker and other regions, generations**